

# HUM210 Introduction to Women and Gender Studies

---



*HUM210*

*Introduction to  
Women and  
Gender Studies*

---

DEBORAH HOLT, BS, MA

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY,  
[HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/  
WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/  
BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html);  
MIT OPENCOURSEWARE, [HTTPS://OCW.MIT.EDU/  
COURSES/WOMENS-AND-GENDER-STUDIES/  
WGS-101-INTRODUCTION-TO-WOMENS-AND-GEN  
DER-STUDIES-FALL-2014/INSTRUCTOR-INSIGHTS/](https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/womens-and-gender-studies/wgs-101-introduction-to-womens-and-gender-studies-fall-2014/instructor-insights/);  
DEBORAH HOLT, BS, MA; AND MILIANN KANG,  
DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY  
STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/  
INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)

Pressbooks/VIVA Open Publishing  
Church Hill, Tennessee





HUM210 Introduction to Women and Gender Studies by Deborah Holt, BS, MA is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), except where otherwise noted.

# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction  | 1  |
| <i>Introduction</i>   |    |
| Deborah Holt, BS, MA  |    |
| <b>PART I. <u>HUM210 - INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN AND GENDER STUDIES - COURSE GOAL, DESCRIPTION &amp; LEARNING TOPICS &amp; OUTCOMES</u></b>   |    |
| 1. HUM210 - Introduction to Women and Gender Studies - Course Goal, Description, Learning Topics & Outcomes   | 5  |
| <i>HUM210 - Introduction to Women and Gender Studies - Course Goal, Description, Learning Topics &amp; Outcomes</i>   |    |
| Deborah Holt, BS, MA  |    |
| <b>PART II. <u>WOMEN'S AND GENDER'S STUDIES AS AN AREA OF STUDY IN THE HUMANITIES</u></b>   |    |
| 2. Women's and Gender's Studies as an Academic Discipline - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes  | 11 |
| <i>Women's and Gender's Studies as an Academic Discipline - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes</i>  |    |
| Deborah Holt, BS, MA  |    |
| 3. "Why/What is Women's and Gender's Studies?"  | 12 |
| MIT OpenCourseWare, <a href="https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/womens-and-gender-studies/wgs-101-introduction-to-womens-and-gender-studies-fall-2014/instructor-insights/">https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/womens-and-gender-studies/wgs-101-introduction-to-womens-and-gender-studies-fall-2014/instructor-insights/</a> |    |

4. Theorizing Lived Experiences 14  
*Theorizing Lived Experiences*  
Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,  
Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,  
<http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/>
5. Identity Terms 22  
*Identity Terms*  
Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,  
Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,  
<http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/>
6. Conceptualizing Structures of Power 29  
*Conceptualizing Structures of Power*  
Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,  
Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,  
<http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/>
7. Explanation of the Concept of Social Construction of Gender 34  
*Explanation of the Concept of Social Construction of Gender*  
Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html>
8. Gender and Biology 38  
*Gender and Biology*  
Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html>
9. Sex on the Brain: Humans, like other mammals, exhibit sex differences in their brains and psychological traits. But what do they signify? 42  
*Sex on the Brain: Humans, like other mammals, exhibit sex differences in their brains and psychological traits. But what do they signify?*  
Kevin J. Mitchell, Ph.D., "Sex on the Brain" published by Aeon Magazine, <https://aeon.co/essays/the-gender-wars-will-end-only-with-a-synthesis-of-research>

- 10.** Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argument in Support of Social Constructionism 54  
*Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argument in Support of Social Constructionism*  
 Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,  
 Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,  
<http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/>
- 11.** Argument that Gender is Not a Social Construct 60  
*Argument that Gender is Not a Social Construct*  
 This article was first published in The Irish Times on 04/04/2013. The article is reproduced here with the permission of The Irish Times and of the author Professor William Reville
- 12.** Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argues Time to Move Beyond "Gender Is Socially Constructed" 64  
*Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argues Time to Move Beyond "Gender Is Socially Constructed"*  
 Michael Mascolo Ph.D. ,  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/old-school-parenting-modern-day-families/201907/time-move-beyond-gender-is-socially-constructed>
- 13.** Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argues There are 3 Fatal Flaws in the "Gender as a Social Construct" Position 69  
*Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argues There are 3 Fatal Flaws in the "Gender as a Social Construct" Position*  
 Adam Groza & Benjamin Arbour, 3 Fatal Flaws in the "Gender as a Social Construct" Position, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/3-fatal-flaws-in-the-gender-as-social-construct-position/>
- 14.** Gender Socialization 73  
*Gender Socialization*  
 Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html>

|            |   |            |
|------------|---|------------|
| <b>15.</b> | <b>Gender Identity in Everyday Life</b>   | <b>77</b>  |
|            | <i>Gender Identity in Everyday Life</i>   |            |
|            | Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a> |            |
| <b>16.</b> | <b>Gender Roles in the U.S.</b>   | <b>83</b>  |
|            | <i>Gender Roles in the U.S.</i>   |            |
|            | Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a> |            |
| <b>17.</b> | <b>The Cross-Cultural Perspective</b>   | <b>88</b>  |
|            | <i>The Cross-Cultural Perspective</i>   |            |
|            | Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a> |            |
| <b>18.</b> | <b>Childhood Socialization</b>  | <b>93</b>  |
|            | <i>Childhood Socialization</i>  |            |
|            | Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a> |            |
| <b>19.</b> | <b>Adolescent Socialization</b>   | <b>96</b>  |
|            | <i>Adolescent Socialization</i>   |            |
|            | Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a> |            |
| <b>20.</b> | <b>Gender Differences in Social Interaction</b>   | <b>102</b> |
|            | <i>Gender Differences in Social Interaction</i>   |            |
|            | Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a> |            |
| <b>21.</b> | <b>The Functionalist Perspective</b>  | <b>107</b> |
|            | <i>The Functionalist Perspective</i>  |            |
|            | Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a> |            |

|   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
| <b>22.</b>                                | The Conflict Perspective<br><i>The Conflict Perspective</i><br>Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a>   | 111 |
| <b>23.</b>                                | Gender Stratification<br><i>Gender Stratification</i><br>Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a>   | 114 |
| PART III. <b><u>INTERSECTIONALITY</u></b> |  |     |
| <b>24.</b>                                | Intersectionality - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes<br><i>Intersectionality - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes</i><br>Deborah Holt, BS, MA  | 121 |
| <b>25.</b>                                | Intersectionality - The Feminist Perspective<br><i>Intersectionality - The Feminist Perspective</i><br>Boundless, Boundless Sociology, <a href="http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html">http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html</a> | 122 |
| <b>26.</b>                                | Intersectionality<br><i>Intersectionality</i><br>Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston, Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, <a href="http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/">http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/</a>  | 127 |
| <b>27.</b>                                | Binary Systems<br><i>Binary Systems</i><br>Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston, Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, <a href="http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/">http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/</a>  | 134 |

|   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| <b>28.</b>                                | Masculinities<br><i>Masculinities</i><br>Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,<br>Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,<br><a href="http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/">http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/</a>   | 136 |
| PART IV. <b><u>INFLUENCE OF WOMEN</u></b> |   |     |
| <b>29.</b>                                | Influence of Women - Student Specific Content<br>Learning Outcomes<br><i>Influence of Women - Student Specific Content Learning<br/>Outcomes</i><br>Deborah Holt, BS, MA  | 141 |
| <b>30.</b>                                | Feminist Movements<br><i>Feminist Movements</i><br>Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,<br>Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,<br><a href="http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/">http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/</a>   | 142 |
| <b>31.</b>                                | 19th Century Feminist Movements<br><i>19th Century Feminist Movements</i><br>Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,<br>Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,<br><a href="http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/">http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/</a>                             | 145 |
| <b>32.</b>                                | Early to Late 20th Century Feminist Movements<br><i>Early to Late 20th Century Feminist Movements</i><br>Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,<br>Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,<br><a href="http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/">http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/</a> | 152 |
| <b>33.</b>                                | Third Wave and Queer Feminist Movements<br><i>Third Wave and Queer Feminist Movements</i><br>Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, and Laura Heston,<br>Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies,<br><a href="http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/">http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/</a>             | 159 |

# *Introduction*

## **Introduction**

DEBORAH HOLT, BS, MA

This book was created to align with the goals and objectives of HUM210 – Introduction to Women and Gender Studies. The idea to create this Open Educational Resource came from my desire to do what I can to help reduce the cost of textbooks for students. This book is free, and you are welcome to share it. The textbook can be read online or downloaded, and when downloading the textbook you will notice there are numerous download formats available to you. For example, you may decide to download the textbook as a PDF file and save it to your computer, so you can read it offline. Additionally, the use of Open Educational Resources enables an instructor to customize a course textbook so that content is specifically designed to meet the course goals and objectives.

The content selected for the creation of the Open Educational Resource is designed to meet the following goal:

Broaden understanding and awareness of Women and Gender studies in the Humanities produced within the cultural and historical contexts of social groups throughout the world drawing upon such fields as art, literature, religion, philosophy, and music.

I hope you enjoy the textbook!

Regards, Debbie Holt



**PART I**

---

**HUM210 -  
INTRODUCTION TO  
WOMEN AND  
GENDER STUDIES -  
COURSE GOAL,  
DESCRIPTION &  
LEARNING TOPICS  
& OUTCOMES**



## CHAPTER 1

---

# *HUM210 - Introduction to Women and Gender Studies - Course Goal, Description, Learning Topics & Outcomes*

## **HUM210 - Introduction to Women and Gender Studies - Course Goal, Description, Learning Topics & Outcomes**

DEBORAH HOLT, BS, MA

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Course Title: Introduction to Women and Gender Studies<br>Course Number: HUM 210<br>Lecture 3 hours. Total 3 hours per week. 3 credits<br>Recommended Course Prerequisites/Corequisites<br>none |  |
|---|--|

### General Purpose of Course:

HUM 210 is an introductory course that emphasizes the roles of women, the contributions they have made to society in global, historical, and cultural settings, and brings awareness to the understandings of gendered experiences. This course encourages students to consider different perspectives and introduces students to the field of Women and Gender Studies as a potential college major.

Intended Audience: Fulfills general education humanities requirement and some major requirements

Catalog Course Description: Broadens understanding and awareness of women by exploring different cultural, historical, and gendered experiences of social groups throughout the world in relationship to such fields as art, literature, religion, philosophy, social sciences, and music. The assignments in this course require college-level reading, analysis of scholarly studies, and coherent communication through properly cited and formatted written reports

---

### COURSE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (Course-Level Outcomes)

| General Learning Outcome Topics       | Specific Student Learning Outcomes (SSLO)<br>The student will be able to...   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Communication (1)                     | Through written, visual and/or oral presentations, describe and construct responses to questions related to Women and Gender Studies. |
| Critical Thinking (2)                 | Discuss and analyze the pros and cons of the various topics and theories associated with Women's and Gender Studies.                  |
| Cultural and Social Understanding (3) | Demonstrate an understanding of Women and Gender issues within global communities and contexts  |

---

### COURSE MAJOR TOPICS OUTCOMES (Module-Level Outcomes)

HUM210 - INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN AND GENDER STUDIES - 7  
 COURSE GOAL, DESCRIPTION, LEARNING TOPICS & OUTCOMES

| Course Major Topics  | Specific Student Content Learning Outcomes for Topic/Unit<br>The student will be able to...  |
|--|--|
| Women's and Gender's Studies as an area of study in the humanities (supports (SSLO) 1) | Articulate and respond to the question, "Why/What is Women's and Gender's Studies?"<br>Discover how gender has been socially constructed and maintained through a variety of institutions in both American society and worldwide.    |
| Intersectionality (supports (SSLO) 3)  | Discuss and analyze intersectionality theory and the complexity of group membership and identities, and the matrix of oppression.<br>Examine the extent to which gender affects access to opportunity, power, and resources          |
| Influence of Women (supports (SSLO) 2 & 3)   | Examine the impact of women within the cultural and historical contexts of social groups throughout the world by focusing on interdisciplinary topics involving interrelationships among Women in the Humanities and related fields. |



**PART II**

---

**WOMEN'S AND  
GENDER'S STUDIES  
AS AN AREA OF  
STUDY IN THE  
HUMANITIES**



## CHAPTER 2

---

# *Women's and Gender's Studies as an Academic Discipline - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes*

## **Women's and Gender's Studies as an Academic Discipline - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes**

DEBORAH HOLT, BS, MA

By the end of this learning unit, student will be able to:

- Articulate and respond to the question, "Why/What is Women's and Gender's Studies?"
- Discover how gender has been socially constructed and maintained through a variety of institutions in both American society and worldwide.

## CHAPTER 3

---

# *“Why/What is Women’s and Gender’s Studies?”*

MIT OPENCOURSEWARE, [HTTPS://OCW.MIT.EDU/COURSES/WOMENS-AND-GENDER-STUDIES/WGS-101-INTRODUCTION-TO-WOMENS-AND-GENDER-STUDIES-FALL-2014/INSTRUCTOR-INSIGHTS/](https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/womens-and-gender-studies/wgs-101-introduction-to-womens-and-gender-studies-fall-2014/instructor-insights/)

### **Why take a course in Women’s and Gender’s Studies?**

A course in Women’s and Gender’s Studies (WGS) will help you become familiar with key issues, questions and debates in Women’s and Gender Studies scholarship, both historical and contemporary. A WGS course will introduce you to many of the critical questions and concepts that feminist scholars have developed as tools for thinking about gendered experience. A WGS course will offer you the opportunity to explore the complex ways in which gender intersects with class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age within various spheres and institutions of society.

### **What is Women’s and Gender’s Studies?**

Women’s and Gender Studies (WGS) is an interdisciplinary field that asks critical questions about the meanings of sex and gender in society. A WGS course offers the opportunity for study and discussion of key issues, questions and debates in Women’s and

Gender Studies, both historical and contemporary. Gender studies scholarship critically analyzes themes of gendered performance and power in a range of social spheres, such as education, culture, and work. A WGS course draws on multiple disciplines—such as art, literature, religion, philosophy, and music — to examine cultural assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality. A WGS course offers the opportunity for analysis of current events with the aim to increase awareness of contemporary and historical experiences of women, and of the multiple ways that sex and gender interact with race, class, nationality and other social identities.

\*The text was changed so as not to be specific to the course description, overview, and outcomes for MIT OpenCourseWare’s WGS.101 Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies course.

## CHAPTER 4

---

# *Theorizing Lived Experiences*

### **Theorizing Lived Experiences**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)

You may have heard the phrase “the personal is political” at some point in your life. This phrase, popularized by feminists in the 1960s, highlights the ways in which our personal experiences are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces within the context of history, institutions, and culture. **Socially-lived theorizing** means creating feminist theories and knowledge from the actual day-to-day experiences of groups of people who have traditionally been excluded from the production of academic knowledge. A key element to feminist analysis is a commitment to the creation of knowledge grounded in the experiences of people belonging to marginalized groups, including for example, women, people of color, people in the Global South, immigrants, indigenous people, gay, lesbian, queer, and trans people, poor and working-class people, and disabled people.

Feminist theorists and activists argue for theorizing beginning from the experiences of the marginalized because people with less power and resources often experience the effects of oppressive

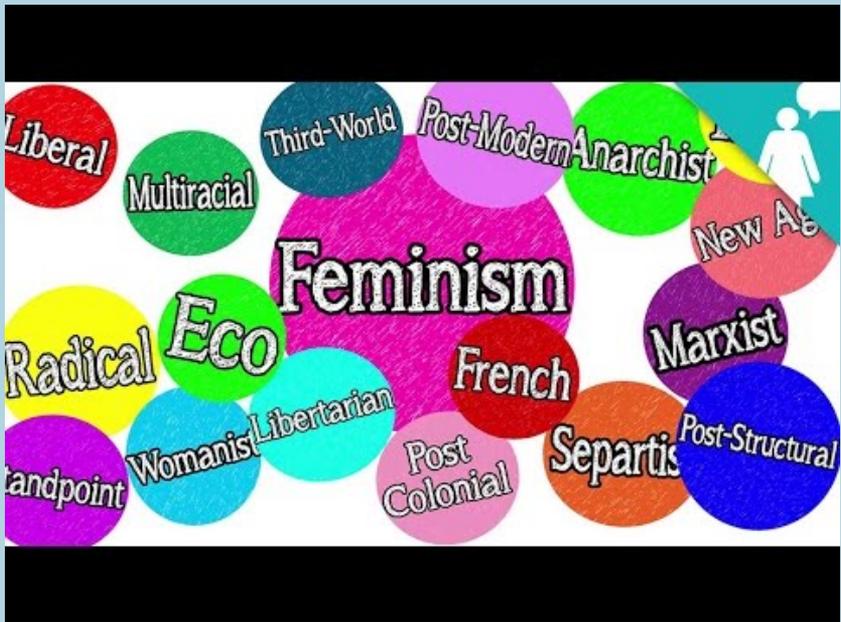
social systems in ways that members of dominant groups do not. From the “bottom” of a social system, participants have knowledge of the power holders of that system as well as their own experiences, while the reverse is rarely true. Therefore, their experiences allow for a more complete knowledge of the workings of systems of power. For example, a story of the development of industry in the 19th century told from the perspective of the owners of factories would emphasize capital accumulation and industrial progress. However, the development of industry in the 19th century for immigrant workers meant working sixteen-hour days to feed themselves and their families and fighting for employer recognition of trade unions so that they could secure decent wages and the eight-hour work day. Depending on which point-of-view you begin with, you will have very different theories of how industrial capitalism developed, and how it works today.

**Feminism** is not a single school of thought but encompasses diverse theories and analytical perspectives—such as socialist feminist theories, radical sex feminist theories, black feminist theories, queer feminist theories, transfeminist theories, feminist disability theories, and intersectional feminist theories.

In the video below, “Barbie explains feminist theories,” Cristen, of “Ask Cristen,” defines feminisms generally as a project that works for the “political, social, and economic equality of the sexes,” and suggests that different types of feminist propose different sources of gender inequality and solutions. Cristen (with Barbie’s help) identifies and defines 11 different types of feminism and the solutions they propose:

- Liberal feminism
- Marxist feminism
- Radical feminism
- Anti-porn feminism
- Sex positive feminism
- Separatist feminism
- Cultural feminism
- Womanism (intersectional feminism)
- Postcolonial feminism
- Ecofeminism
- Girlie feminism

What types of feminism do Cristen and Barbie leave out of this list? Do you agree with how they characterize these types of feminism? Which issues across these feminisms do you think are most important?



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/?p=24>

Stuff Mom Never Told You – HowStuffWorks. (2016, March 3). *Barbie*

*Explains Feminist Theories | Radical, Liberal, Black, etc.* Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3D\\_C-Nes60](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3D_C-Nes60).

The common thread in all these feminist theories is the belief that knowledge is shaped by the political and social context in which it is made (Scott 1991). Acknowledging that all knowledge is constructed by individuals inhabiting particular social locations, feminist theorists argue that **reflexivity**—understanding how one’s social position influences the ways that they understand the world—is of utmost necessity when creating theory and knowledge. As people occupy particular social locations in terms of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, these **multiple identities** in combination all at the same time shape their social experiences. At certain times, specific dimensions of their identities may be more salient than at others, but at no time is anyone without multiple identities. Thus, categories of identity are intersectional, influencing the experiences that individuals have and the ways they see and understand the world around them.

In the United States, we often are taught to think that people are self-activating, self-actualizing individuals. We repeatedly hear that everyone is unique and that everyone has an equal chance to make something of themselves. While feminists also believe that people have **agency**—or the ability to influence the direction of their lives—they also argue that an individual’s agency is limited or enhanced by their social position. A powerful way to understand oneself and one’s multiple identities is to situate one’s experiences within multiple **levels of analysis**—**micro** - (individual), **meso**- (group), **macro**- (structural), and **global**. These levels of analysis

offer different analytical approaches to understanding a social phenomenon. Connecting personal experiences to larger, structural forces of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability allows for a more powerful understanding of how our own lives are shaped by forces greater than ourselves, and how we might work to change these larger forces of inequality. Like a microscope that is initially set on a view of the most minute parts of a cell, moving back to see the whole of the cell, and then pulling one's eye away from the microscope to see the whole of the organism, these levels of analysis allow us to situate day-to-day experiences and phenomena within broader, structural processes that shape whole populations. The **micro** level is that which we, as individuals, live everyday—interacting with other people on the street, in the classroom, or while we are at a party or a social gathering. Therefore, the micro-level is the level of analysis focused on individuals' experiences. The **meso** level of analysis moves the microscope back, seeing how groups, communities and organizations structure social life. A meso level-analysis might look at how churches shape gender expectations for women, how schools teach students to become girls and boys, or how workplace policies make gender transition and recognition either easier or harder for trans and gender nonconforming workers. The **macro** level consists of government policies, programs, and institutions, as well as ideologies and categories of identity. In this way, the macro level involves national power structures as well as cultural ideas about different groups of people according to race, class, gender, and sexuality spread through various national institutions, such as media, education and policy. Finally, the **global** level of analysis includes transnational production, trade, and migration, global capitalism, and transnational trade and law bodies (such as the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization)—larger transnational forces that bear upon our personal lives but that we often ignore or fail to see.

Applying multiple levels of analysis, let's look at the experiences of a Latina working in a *maquiladora*, a factory on the border of the US and Mexico. These factories were built to take advantage of the difference in the price of labor in these two countries. At the micro level, we can see the worker's daily struggles to feed herself and her family. We can see how exhausted she is from working every day for more than eight hours and then coming home to care for herself and her family. Perhaps we could examine how she has developed a persistent cough or skin problems from working with the chemicals in the factory and using water contaminated with run-off from the factory she lives near. On the meso-level, we can see how the community that she lives within has been transformed by the *maquiladora*, and how other women in her community face similar financial, health, and environmental problems. We may also see how these women are organizing together to attempt to form a union that can press for higher wages and benefits. Moving to the macro and global levels, we can situate these experiences within the Mexican government's participation within global and regional trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Act (CAFTA) and their negative effects on environmental regulations and labor laws, as well as the effects of global capitalist restructuring that has shifted production from North America and Europe to Central and South America and Asia. For further discussion, see the textbook section on globalization.

Recognizing how forces greater than ourselves operate in shaping the successes and failures we typically attribute to individual decisions allows us see how inequalities are patterned by race, class, gender, and sexuality—not just by individual decisions.

Approaching these issues through multiple levels of analysis—at the micro, meso, and macro/global levels—gives a more integrative and complete understanding of both personal experience and the ways in which macro structures affect the people who live within them. Through looking at labor in a *maquiladora* through multiple levels of analysis we are able to connect what are experienced at the micro level as personal problems to macro economic, cultural, and social problems. This not only gives us the ability to develop socially-lived theory, but also allows us to organize with other people who feel similar effects from the same economic, cultural, and social problems in order to challenge and change these problems.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

## CHAPTER 5

---

# *Identity Terms*

### **Identity Terms**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)

Language is political, hotly contested, always evolving, and deeply personal to each person who chooses the terms with which to identify themselves. To demonstrate respect and awareness of these complexities, it is important to be attentive to language and to honor and use individuals' self-referential terms (Farinas and Farinas 2015). Below are some common identity terms and their meanings. This discussion is not meant to be definitive or prescriptive but rather aims to highlight the stakes of language and the debates and context surrounding these terms, and to assist in understanding terms that frequently come up in classroom discussions. While there are no strict rules about "correct" or "incorrect" language, these terms reflect much more than personal preferences. They reflect individual and collective histories, ongoing scholarly debates, and current politics.

**People of color** is a contemporary term used mainly in the

United States to refer to all individuals who are non-white (Safire 1988). It is a political, coalitional term, as it encompasses common experiences of racism. People of color is abbreviated as **POC**. **Black** or **African American** are commonly the preferred terms for most individuals of African descent today. These are widely used terms, though sometimes they obscure the specificity of individuals' histories. Other preferred terms are African diasporic or African descent, to refer, for example, to people who trace their lineage to Africa but migrated through Latin America and the Caribbean. **Colored people** is an antiquated term used before the civil rights movement in the United States and the United Kingdom to refer pejoratively to individuals of African descent. The term is now taken as a slur, as it represents a time when many forms of institutional racism during the Jim Crow era were legal.

Some people prefer person-first phrasing, while others prefer identity-first phrasing. **People-first language** linguistically puts the person before their impairment (physical, sensory or mental difference). Example: "a *woman with* a vision impairment." This terminology encourages **nondisabled** people to think of those with disabilities as people (Logsdon 2016). The acronym PWD stands for "people with disabilities." Although it aims to humanize, people-first language has been critiqued for aiming to create distance from the impairment, which can be understood as devaluing the impairment. Those who prefer **identity-first language** often emphasize embracing their impairment as an integral, important, valued aspect of themselves, which they do not want to distance themselves from. Example: "a *disabled person*." Using this language points to how society disables individuals (Liebowitz 2015). Many terms in common use have ableist meanings, such as evaluative expressions like "lame," "retarded," "crippled," and "crazy." It is important to avoid using these terms. Although in the case of disability, both people-first and disability-first phrasing are

currently in use, as mentioned above, this is not the case when it comes to race.

**Transgender** generally refers to individuals who identify as a gender not assigned to them at birth. The term is used as an adjective (i.e., “a transgender woman,” not “a transgender”), however some individuals describe themselves by using transgender as a noun. The term **transgendered** is not preferred because it emphasizes ascription and undermines self-definition. **Trans** is an abbreviated term and individuals appear to use it self-referentially these days more often than **transgender**. **Transition** is both internal and social. Some individuals who transition do not experience a change in their gender identity since they have always identified in the way that they do. **Trans\*** is an all-inclusive umbrella term which encompasses all nonnormative gender identities (Tompkins 2014). **Non-binary** and **genderqueer** refer to gender identities beyond binary identifications of man or woman. The term genderqueer became popularized within queer and trans communities in the 1990s and 2000s, and the term non-binary became popularized in the 2010s (Roxie 2011). **Agender**, meaning “without gender,” can describe people who do not have a gender identity, while others identify as non-binary or gender neutral, have an undefinable identity, or feel indifferent about gender (Brooks 2014). **Genderfluid** people experience shifts between gender identities. The term **transsexual** is a medicalized term, and indicates a binary understanding of gender and an individual's identification with the “opposite” gender from the gender assigned to them at birth. **Cisgender** or **cis** refers to individuals who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. Some people prefer the term **non-trans**. Additional gender identity terms exist; these are just a few basic and commonly used terms. Again, the emphasis of these terms is on viewing individuals as they view themselves and using their self-designated names and pronouns.

**Queer** as an identity term refers to a non-categorical sexual identity; it is also used as a catch-all term for all **LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer)** individuals. The term was historically used in a derogatory way, but was reclaimed as a self-referential term in the 1990s United States. Although many individuals identify as queer today, some still feel personally insulted by it and disapprove of its use. **Bisexual** is typically defined as a sexual orientation marked by attraction to either men or women. This has been problematized as a binary approach to sexuality, which excludes individuals who do not identify as men or women. **Pansexual** is a sexual identity marked by sexual attraction to people of any gender or sexuality. **Polyamorous (poly, for short) or non-monogamous** relationships are open or non-exclusive; individuals may have multiple consensual and individually-negotiated sexual and/or romantic relationships at once (Klesse 2006). **Asexual** is an identity marked by a lack of or rare sexual attraction, or low or absent interest in sexual activity, abbreviated to “**ace**” (Decker 2014). Asexuals distinguish between sexual and **romantic attraction**, delineating various sub-identities included under an **ace umbrella**. In several later sections of this book, we discuss the terms **heteronormativity, homonormativity, and homonationalism**; these terms are not self-referential identity descriptors but are used to describe how sexuality is constructed in society and the politics around such constructions.

**Latino** is a term used to describe people of Latin American origin or descent in the United States, while **Latin American** describes people in Latin America. **Latino** can refer specifically to a man of Latin American origin or descent; **Latina** refers specifically to a woman of Latin American origin or descent. The terms **Latino/a** and **Latin@** include both the –o and –a endings to avoid the sexist

use of “Latino” to refer to all individuals. **Chicano**, **Chicano/a**, and **Chican@** similarly describe people of Mexican origin or descent in the United States, and may be used interchangeably with **Mexican American**, **Xicano** or **Xicano/a**. However, as **Chicano** has the connotation of being politically active in working to end oppression of Mexican Americans, and is associated with the Chicano literary and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, people may prefer the use of either **Chicano** or **Mexican American**, depending on their political orientation. **Xicano** is a shortened form of Mexicano, from the Nahuatl name for the indigenous Mexica Aztec Empire. Some individuals prefer the **Xicano** spelling to emphasize their indigenous ancestry (Revilla 2004). **Latinx** and **Chicanx** avoid either the -a or the -o gendered endings to explicitly include individuals of all genders (Ramirez and Blay 2017). **Hispanic** refers to the people and nations with a historical link to Spain and to people of country heritage who speak the Spanish language. Although many people can be considered both Latinx and Hispanic, Brazilians, for example, are Latin American but neither Hispanic nor Latino, while Spaniards are Hispanic but not Latino. Preferred terms vary regionally and politically; these terms came into use in the context of the Anglophone-dominated United States.

**Indigenous** refers to descendants of the original inhabitants of an area, in contrast to those that have settled, occupied or colonized the area (Turner 2006). Terms vary by specificity; for example, in Australia, individuals are **Aboriginal**, while those in Canada are **First Nations**. “**Aboriginal**” is sometimes used in the Canadian context, too, though more commonly in settler-government documents, not so much as a term of self-definition. In the United States, individuals may refer to themselves as **Indian**, **American Indian**, **Native**, or **Native American**, or, perhaps more commonly, they may refer to their specific tribes or nations.

Because of the history of the term, “**Indian**,” like other reclaimed terms, outsiders should be very careful in using it.

**Global South** and **Global North** refer to socioeconomic and political divides. Areas of the **Global South**, which are typically socioeconomically and politically disadvantaged are Africa, Latin America, parts of Asia, and the Middle East. Generally, **Global North** areas, including the United States, Canada, Western Europe and parts of East Asia, are typically socioeconomically and politically advantaged. Terms like **Third world**, **First world**, **Developing country**, and **Developed country** have been problematized for their hierarchical meanings, where areas with more resources and political power are valued over those with less resources and less power (Silver 2015). Although the terms **Global South** and **Global North** carry the same problematic connotations, these tend to be the preferred terms today. In addition, although the term **Third world** has been problematized, some people do not see **Third world** as a negative term and use it self-referentially. Also, **Third world** was historically used as an oppositional and coalitional term for nations and groups who were non-aligned with either the capitalist **First world** and communist **Second world** especially during the Cold War. For example, those who participated in the **Third World Liberation Strike** at San Francisco State University from 1968 to 1969 used the term to express solidarity and to establish Black Studies and the Ethnic Studies College (Springer 2008). We use certain terms, like **Global North/South**, throughout the book, with the understanding that there are problematic aspects of these usages.

**Transnational** has been variously defined. Transnational describes migration and the transcendence of borders, signals the diminishing relevance of the nation-state in the current iteration

of globalization, is used interchangeably with **diasporic** (any reference to materials from a region outside its current location), designates a form of neocolonialism (e.g., transnational capital) and signals the NGOization of social movements. For Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001), the terms “transnational women’s movements” or “global women’s movements” are used to refer to U.N. conferences on women, global feminism as a policy and activist arena, and human rights initiatives that enact new forms of governmentality. Chandra Mohanty (2003) has argued that transnational feminist scholarship and social movements critique and mobilize against globalization, capitalism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and non-national institutions like the World Trade Organization. In this sense, transnational refers to “cross-national solidarity” in feminist organizing. Grewal and Caplan (2001) have observed that transnational feminist inquiry also examines how these movements have been tied to colonial processes and imperialism, as national and international histories shape transnational social movements. In feminist politics and studies, the term transnational is used much more than “international,” which has been critiqued because it centers the nation-state. Whereas transnational can also take seriously the role of the state it does not assume that the state is the most relevant actor in global processes. Although all of these are technically global processes, the term “global” is oftentimes seen as abstract. It appeals to the notion of “global sisterhood,” which is often suspect because of the assumption of commonalities among women that often times do not exist.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

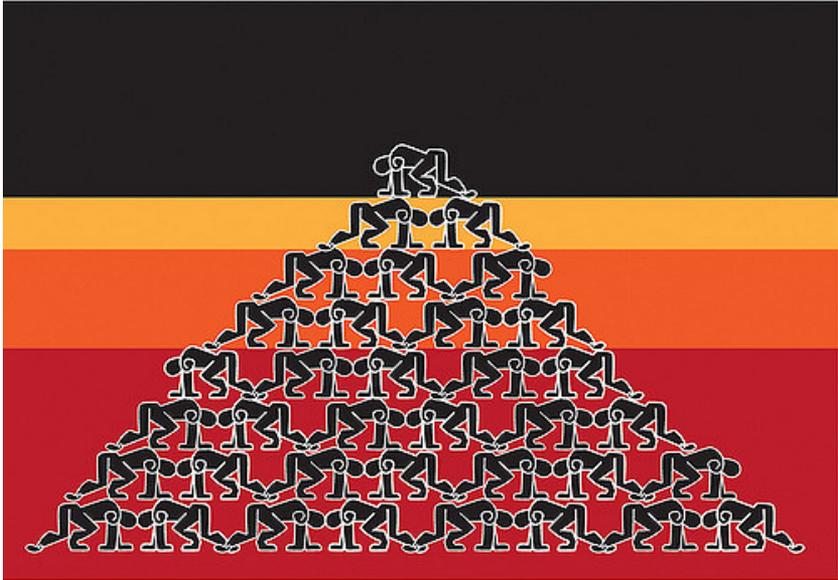
**CHAPTER 6**

---

*Conceptualizing Structures of  
Power*

**Conceptualizing Structures of Power**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)



*"Social Structure" by Shane is licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)*

The elements of a social structure, the parts of social life that direct possible actions, are the institutions of society. **Social institutions** may be understood to include: the government, work, education, family, law, media, and medicine, among others. To say these institutions direct, or structure, possible social action, means that within the confines of these spaces there are rules, norms, and procedures that limit what actions are possible. For instance, family is a concept near and dear to most, but historically and culturally family forms have been highly specified, that is structured. According to Dorothy Smith (1993), the standard North American family (or, SNAF) includes two heterosexually-married parents and one or more biologically-related children. It also includes a division of labor in which the husband/father earns a larger income and the wife/mother takes responsibility for most of the care-taking and childrearing. Although families vary in all sorts of ways, this is the norm to which they are most often compared. Thus, while we may consider our pets, friends, and lovers as family, the state,

the legal system, and the media do not affirm these possibilities in the way they affirm the SNAF. In turn, when most people think of who is in their family, the normative notion of parents and children structures who they consider.

Overlaying these social structures are **structures of power**. By **power** we mean two things: 1) access to and through the various social institutions mentioned above, and 2) processes of privileging, normalizing, and valuing certain identities over others. This definition of power highlights the structural, institutional nature of power, while also highlighting the ways in which culture works in the creation and privileging of certain categories of people. Power in American society is organized along the axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, nation, and religious identities. Some identities are more highly valued, or more normalized, than others—typically because they are contrasted to identities thought to be less valuable or less “normal.” Thus, identities are not only descriptors of individuals, but grant a certain amount of collective access to the institutions of social life. This is not to say, for instance, that all white people are alike and wield the same amount of power over all people of color. It does mean that white, middle-class women as a group tend to hold more social power than middle-class women of color. This is where the concept of intersectionality is key. All individuals have multiple aspects of identity, and simultaneously experience some **privileges** due to their socially valued identity statuses and disadvantages due to their devalued identity statuses. Thus a white, heterosexual middle-class woman may be disadvantaged compared to a white middle-class man, but she may experience advantages in different contexts in relation to a black, heterosexual middle-class woman, or a white, heterosexual working-class man, or a white lesbian upper-class woman.



*["Privilege is when you think something is not a problem because it is not a problem to you personally – SURJ MN" by Tony Webster is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0](#)*

At the higher level of social structure, we can see that some people have greater access to resources and institutionalized power across the board than do others. **Sexism** is the term we use for discrimination and blocked access women face. **Genderism** describes discrimination and blocked access that transgender people face. **Racism** describes discrimination and blocked access on the basis of race, which is based on socially-constructed meanings rather than biological differences. **Classism** describes discrimination on the basis of social class, or blocked access to material wealth and social status. **Ableism** describes discrimination on the basis of physical, mental, or emotional impairment or blocked access to the fulfillment of needs and in particular, full participation in social life. These “-isms” reflect dominant cultural notions that women, trans people, people of color, poor people, and disabled people are inferior to men, non-

trans people, white people, middle- and upper-class people, and non-disabled people. Yet, the “-isms” are greater than individuals’ prejudice against women, trans people, people of color, the poor, and disabled people. For instance, in the founding of the United States the institutions of social life, including work, law, education, and the like, were built to benefit wealthy, white men since at the time these were, by law, the only real “citizens” of the country. Although these institutions have significantly changed over time in response to social movements and more progressive cultural shifts, their sexist, genderist, racist, classist, and ableist structures continue to persist in different forms today. Similar-sounding to “-isms,” the language of “-ization,” such as in “racialization” is used to highlight the formation or processes by which these forms of difference have been given meaning and power (Omi and Winant 1986).

Just like the human body’s skeletal structure, social structures are not immutable, or completely resistant to change. Social movements mobilized on the basis of identities have fought for increased equality and changed the structures of society, in the US and abroad, over time. However, these struggles do not change society overnight; some struggles last decades, centuries, or remain always unfinished. The structures and institutions of social life change slowly, but they can and do change based on the concerted efforts of individuals, social movements and social institutions.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

## CHAPTER 7

---

# *Explanation of the Concept of Social Construction of Gender*

### **Explanation of the Concept of Social Construction of Gender**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER**

---

Social constructivists propose that there is no inherent truth to gender; it is constructed by social expectations and gender performance.

---

### *KEY POINTS*

---

- Social constructionism is the notion that people's understanding of reality is partially, if not entirely, socially situated.

- Gender is a social identity that needs to be contextualized.
- Individuals internalize social expectations for gender norms and behave accordingly.

## TERMS

---

- social constructionism The idea that social institutions and knowledge are created by actors within the system, rather than having any inherent truth on their own.
  - Gender performativity Gender Performativity is a term created by post-structuralist feminist philosopher Judith Butler in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, which has subsequently been used in a variety of academic fields that describes how individuals participate in social constructions of gender.
  - essentialism The view that objects have properties that are essential to them.
- 

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

---

The social construction of gender comes out of the general school of thought entitled social constructionism. Social constructionism proposes that everything people “know” or see as “reality” is partially, if not entirely, socially situated. To say that something is socially constructed does not mitigate the power of the concept. Take, for example, money. Money is a socially constructed reality. Paper bills are worth nothing independent of the value individuals ascribe to them. The dollar is only worth as much as value as Americans are willing to ascribe to it. Note that the dollar only works in its own currency market; it holds no value in areas that

don't use the dollar. Nevertheless, the dollar is extremely powerful within its own domain.

These basic theories of social constructionism can be applied to any issue of study pertaining to human life, including gender. Is gender an essential category or a social construct? If it is a social construct, how does it function? Who benefits from the way that gender is constructed? A social constructionist view of gender looks beyond categories and examines the intersections of multiple identities and the blurring of the boundaries between essentialist categories. This is especially true with regards to categories of male and female, which are viewed typically as binary and opposite. Social constructionism seeks to blur the binary and muddle these two categories, which are so frequently presumed to be essential.

## JUDITH BUTLER AND GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

---

Judith Butler is one of the most prominent social theorists currently working on issues pertaining to the social construction of gender. Butler is a trained philosopher and has oriented her work towards feminism and queer theory. Butler's most known work is *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, published in 1991, which argues for gender performativity. This means that gender is not an essential category. The repetitious performances of "male" and "female" in accordance with social norms reifies the categories, creating the appearance of a naturalized and essential binary. Gender is never a stable descriptor of an individual, but an individual is always "doing" gender, performing or deviating from the socially accepted performance of gender stereotypes. Doing gender is not just about acting in a particular way. It is about embodying and believing certain gender norms and engaging in practices that map on to those norms. These performances normalize the essentialism of gender categories. In other words, by doing gender, we reinforce the notion that there are only two mutually exclusive categories of gender. The internalized belief that

men and women are essentially different is what makes men and women behave in ways that appear essentially different. Gender is maintained as a category through socially constructed displays of gender.

Doing gender is fundamentally a social relationship. One does gender in order to be perceived by others in a particular way, either as male, female, or as troubling those categories. Certainly, gender is internalized and acquires significance for the individual; some individuals want to feel feminine or masculine. Social constructionists might argue that because categories are only formed within a social context, even the affect of gender is in some ways a social relation. Moreover, we hold ourselves and each other for our presentation of gender, or how we “measure up.” We are aware that others evaluate and characterize our behavior on the parameter of gender. Social constructionists would say that gender is interactional rather than individual—it is developed through social interactions. Gender is also said to be omnirelevant, meaning that people are always judging our behavior to be either male or female.

## JUDITH BUTLER

---

Author of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

## CHAPTER 8

---

# *Gender and Biology*

### **Gender and Biology**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **THE ROLE OF BIOLOGY**

---

Biology determines sex, while social norms determine gender.

---

### *KEY POINTS*

---

- Though males and females have biological differences, they are more similar than is usually expected. Difference arises from cultural expectations.
- Gender takes many forms and is shaped by religious, political, legal, philosophical, linguistic, and other traditions.

- Social constructs around gender often have a biological component. For example, historically in many cultures women are seen as the weaker sex, both because they have been relegated to less powerful social roles and because biologically, women tend to have less muscle mass.

### TERMS

---

- **gender** The socio-cultural phenomenon of the division of people into various categories such as male and female, with each having associated roles, expectations, stereotypes, etc.
- **sex** Either of two main divisions (female or male) into which many organisms can be placed, according to reproductive function or organs.

### EXAMPLE

---

- The hijras of the Indian subcontinent are traditionally either eunuchs (castrated biological males) or born with ambiguous genitalia. Although hijras dress as women and exhibit what is normally considered as “feminine” behavior, they believe themselves to belong to a “third gender,” identifying neither as male nor female.

---

It is important to distinguish between sex and gender. Sex refers to a person’s biological make-up as male or female. Typically, a person’s genotype (genetic makeup) and phenotype (observable traits) are used to determine a person’s sex. Males are defined

as having an XY 23<sup>rd</sup> chromosome, while females are defined as having an XX 23<sup>rd</sup> chromosome (though tests have revealed variations in chromosomes, including XXY, XYY, and XXX). Scientists have linked a person's 23<sup>rd</sup> chromosome to the development of a sexed phenotype. Anatomically, males and females have different reproductive organs: a penis, testicles, and scrotum for males, and a vagina, uterus, and ovaries for females. Other anatomical differences include the development of breasts among females, and the presence of a menstrual cycle.

Male and female are generally understood as discrete categories, often referred to as "opposite" sexes. In fact, the majority of male and female biology is identical. Male and female reproductive systems are distinct, but otherwise most bodily systems function the same way. With regards to digestive, respiratory, circulatory, lymphatic, musculoskeletal, nervous, immune, sensory, endocrine, and integumentary systems, males and females have many more similarities than differences. Likewise, males and females have nearly all the same hormones present in their bodies, though the amount of certain hormones (such as estrogen and testosterone) varies.

While sex is the determination of whether a person is biologically male or female, gender is the sociocultural determination of

understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman. Sex is largely constant across different cultures; in virtually any country, a person with XY chromosomes and male reproductive organs is considered male. Gender, however, takes many forms and is shaped by religious, political, legal, philosophical, linguistic, and other traditions. For example, in some countries, wearing make-up is associated with women and is seen as feminine. Elsewhere, men routinely wear make-up and it is seen as masculine. Across history in most parts of the world, women have been denied access to economic independence and legal and political rights more often than men have. This oppression is based on cultural

understandings of women as the weaker sex, but is often linked to females' biological capacity for bearing and nursing children. Some physical differences between the male and female sexes are thought to occur as a result of both biological and cultural processes. For example, on average, males have more upper body strength than females. This difference is partially the result of differences in the biological development of the musculoskeletal system, but is exacerbated by the cultural tendency for men to use their upper body muscles more than women through physical labor and athletics . Similarly, males have a shorter life expectancy than females do, on average. Again, this may partially result from different biological make-ups, but decreased life-expectancy gaps in developed countries proves that cultural institutions contribute to the gap. When men and women have similar careers and lifestyles, the life-expectancy gap decreases.

*\*Change to the original content includes the removal of the video.*

## CHAPTER 9

---

*Sex on the Brain: Humans, like other mammals, exhibit sex differences in their brains and psychological traits. But what do they signify?*

**Sex on the Brain: Humans, like other mammals, exhibit sex differences in their brains and psychological traits. But what do they signify?**

KEVIN J. MITCHELL, PH.D., "SEX ON THE BRAIN" PUBLISHED BY AEON MAGAZINE, [HTTPS://AEON.CO/ESSAYS/ THE-GENDER-WARS-WILL-END-ONLY-WITH-A-SYNTHESIS-OF-RESEARCH](https://aeon.co/essays/the-gender-wars-will-end-only-with-a-synthesis-of-research)

---

Published by Aeon Magazine <https://aeon.co/essays/the-gender-wars-will-end-only-with-a-synthesis-of-research>

---

By [Kevin Mitchell](#) is a neurogeneticist. He is associate

---

professor at the Smurfit Institute of Genetics and the Institute of Neuroscience at Trinity College Dublin. His latest book is [\*Innate: How the Wiring of Our Brains Shapes Who We Are\*](#) (2018). He lives in Portmarnock, Ireland.

---

Edited by [Marina Benjamin](#)

---

Sex differences really do exist. Men and women, boys and girls, really do behave differently. The question – and difficulty – lies in establishing where these differences come from. Are the sexes wired differently? Or does culture explain observed behavioural differences? The answers are yes and yes; but, unfortunately, biological and cultural explanations are so often seen as mutually exclusive that a middle ground can be hard to discern. Instead, the debate about the origins of sex differences tends to get polarised into extreme positions, with straw persons being erected and toppled by each camp, while epithets of ‘neurosexism’ and ‘sex-difference denier’ are lobbed across the divide.

The debate is especially contentious at the moment, with proponents of nature or nurture each claiming that the latest brain science proves their position. Results from neuroimaging studies are pointed to as ‘proof at last’ that the brains of men and women really are innately different, and that these differences explain the differences we see in behaviour. Yet the very same results are held up as [evidence](#) that there really is no such thing as a ‘male brain’ or ‘female brain’, and that any observable differences between the sexes are not innate in origin, but owe to the effects of growing up in a gendered environment. Either way, important implications for social policy are drawn, based on the favoured interpretation of the evidence.

In her recent [book](#), *The Gendered Brain* (2019), the English neuroscientist Gina Rippon [argues](#) against the ‘myth’ of innate biological differences and claims that brain and behavioural differences arise instead from cultural forces. She provides

compelling evidence that much of the historical research in this area has been (and, in some cases, continues to be) driven by an overtly or implicitly sexist agenda, intent on finding scientific proof of female inferiority.

In the other corner, the Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson contends on Twitter that: 'Sex differences are large and biological/innate. The science is clear. The opposing sociology is delusional.' In a now-infamous memo, the Google employee James Damore argued in 2017 that innate sex differences in interests and aptitudes partly explain observed differences in occupational choices, especially the relative lack of women in STEM fields (and at Google). Damore was promptly fired for his intemperate comments, and roundly excoriated by many commentators. Yet in other quarters, he was celebrated as a brave proponent of free speech and scientific truth.

Both sides can end up arguing for rather blinkered positions. Peterson, for example, maintains that the pay gap can be explained by women scoring higher, on average, in the personality trait of agreeableness: training women to be less agreeable, he contends, would improve their financial success in the workplace. Meanwhile, the Canadian cognitive scientist Steven Pinker recently decried an article in *The New York Times* – which looked at why women do more than their share of the housework – for not considering biological sex differences as a possible factor. Even if he had a point, his apparent disregard for entrenched patriarchal norms scotched any sympathy he might have found on social media.

Meanwhile, the American psychologist Michael Reichert argued, also in *The New York Times*, that 'violence springs from what boys learn about what it means to be a man' – as opposed to any inborn tendencies towards physical aggression. This despite the [scientific evidence](#) showing that sex differences in physical aggression are universal across human societies, have a cogent evolutionary rationale, manifest in most other mammalian species, and have well-worked-out biological mechanisms.

Much of the cultural discussion around sex differences amounts, in the words often attributed to the American philosopher William James, to people simply 'rearranging their prejudices' so as to privilege evidence that supports their position, while focusing the full glare of a skeptical spotlight on contradictory findings. Rippon, for example, rightly critiques shoddy early neuroimaging work that claimed to have found biologically driven brain differences directly accountable for observed sex differences in behaviour. She is far less critical, however, of the equally shaky literature claiming that brain plasticity can drive differences in macroscopic brain structure, which in turn might account for behavioural differences.

We are all human, of course: all subject to this kind of confirmation bias. At least a researcher's position on the primary question of the origins of sex differences is typically made explicit. But people working in different disciplines and reading various literatures will also entertain a host of underlying subsidiary beliefs that are less overt, and that strongly influence how they weigh various types of evidence or argument. They might have strong prior positions on whether individuals have any innate psychological predispositions and if such traits are influenced by genetics; whether findings in animals are relevant to human psychology; whether human minds have been shaped by their recent evolutionary past; if experience can reshape brain structure, or personality traits play a larger role in explaining behaviour.

These deep but usually unstated differences in starting positions leave scientists and commentators talking past each other, and the general public none the wiser. They can even lead to the same data being interpreted in diametrically opposed ways – which raises the question of where the solid scientific ground actually lies. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the interpretation of results from neuroimaging studies.

In a 2015 [study](#) that has given rise to the 'mosaic brain' hypothesis, the psychologist Daphna Joel at Tel Aviv University and colleagues analysed brain scans from more than 1,400 people, looking for

regions of the brain where there was a statistically significant difference in volume between the sexes. They found 10 regions showing such differences, some larger in males, some in females. On the face of it, their findings seemed to support the idea that male and female brains are structurally distinct. However, each of the 10 regions under scrutiny varies in volume across individuals anyway, with the distribution simply shifted slightly higher or lower in the other sex. Joel's team found that very few individuals showed extreme 'male' or 'female' values for all 10 regions; instead, most showed a pattern of values falling mainly in the overlapping zones, with only a general trend towards one end or the other.

The authors concluded that the brains of males and females are not categorically distinct. In other words, there is no such thing as a 'male brain' or a 'female brain'. Rather, they suggest that each individual's brain is a 'mosaic' of masculinised and feminised regions, the implication being that we should not expect biologically driven sex differences in behaviour. Yet, within months, [multiple other researchers](#) showed that the same data could very reliably be used to categorise individual brains as male or female. While the volume of any individual area is a terrible predictor of sex, a multivariate analysis gives very good discrimination. On this reading, the brains of males and females are not dimorphic, with two completely different forms, like genitalia; [instead](#), they show a correlated set of shifts in the size of various features, similar to what is observed for male and female faces, which are also readily distinguished.

Another neuroimaging [study](#) that drew media attention for the contrary readings it spawned was undertaken in 2014 by the neuroscientist Madhura Ingalhalikar and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania. They measured the connections between brain regions, and found some sex differences in organisation, with females tending to have more connections between the two hemispheres, and males having slightly more running front-to-back within each hemisphere. The data seemed

pretty robust, and fit with prior findings of greater cross-hemispheric connectivity in females. Still, the authors were [criticised](#) for how they interpreted the findings. They speculated – rather freely – that ‘male brains are structured to facilitate connectivity between perception and coordinated action, whereas female brains are designed to facilitate communication between analytical and intuitive processing modes’. In the press release for their paper, they claimed that the differences could explain why ‘men are more likely better at learning and performing a single task at hand, like cycling or navigating directions, whereas women have superior memory and social cognition skills, making them more equipped for multitasking and creating solutions that work for a group’.

In the absence of any causal link between the observed differences in brain structure and those in behaviour, such claims are purely speculative. Nor were the chosen examples of supposed sex differences in behaviour particularly convincing (are men really psychologically more suited to cycling?). Claims like these rely on unsupported inferences of there being close links between the size of bits of the brain and performance of complex human behaviours.

As it happens, there is good evidence that male and female brains *are* structurally different at the macroscopic scale. A number of [recent, largescale neuroimaging studies](#) have found numerous small but correlated differences that collectively distinguish male and female brains in the samples studied. However, just observing such differences doesn’t prove that they are driven by innate biological factors. Indeed, a prominent argument – advanced by Rippon, among others – is that they are caused by our brains reacting to the differing experiences of males and females in a culture that is pervasively gendered.

## The focus on neuroimaging is a bit of a red herring in the sex-difference wars

Our brains are, of course, highly plastic and designed to respond to experience. But most of that plasticity [happens](#) on a microscopic scale – changing the weights of connections between neurons. The idea that culturally loaded experience can drive macroscopic differences in the size of bits of the brain is something else entirely. That claim relies on a small number of studies, such as the one from [2000](#) showing that London taxi drivers have a larger posterior hippocampus, which seems to have acquired an almost mythic lore, despite the collective evidence base being quite limited.

The idea that brain areas might grow with use, or that levels of neural activity might change in regionally specific ways as a result of the *quality* of experience is both vague and speculative. Despite myths to the contrary, we are effectively using all of our brain all of the time, while awake at least. If brain tissue were really like muscle, our brains would be busting out of our skulls. And if growth of one area occurred at the expense of neighbouring regions (which would seem like a design flaw), then you'd expect a complementary pattern of brain differences – each bit that is relatively bigger in males would be adjacent to a bit that is relatively smaller – which is not observed.

Given that neuroanatomical sex differences are consistently [observed](#) in children – even [reported](#) in infants as young as one month old – and are ubiquitous across other animal species (with well-worked-out developmental mechanisms in [many cases](#)), it seems likely that observed neuroanatomical sex differences in humans are the result of conserved programmes of masculinisation or feminisation of brain development. But here's the thing – we don't know what these differences mean. Really, we have no clue. This is not unique to sex differences: we don't know

what any differences in the size of little bits of the brain mean. And this is despite countless efforts to link variation in size of this or that brain region or this or that nerve tract to a corresponding variation in psychological or behavioural traits, and no shortage of reports of such correlations in the literature.

The relationship between bits of the brain and cognitive functions or behaviours is simply not so modular. This is only a modern version of phrenology, where the size and shape of depressions and bumps on the skull was supposed to reveal the size of underlying brain areas and the consequent psychology of individuals. The complexity of the cellular circuitry and connectivity of any given region is too great for its function to be straightforwardly mapped to the amount of neural real estate it occupies.

What we do know is that most of the known sex differences in the brains of other animals are found in small but important populations of cells, themselves located in tiny brain regions with exotic names such as the 'interstitial nucleus of the hypothalamus' or the 'bed nucleus of the stria terminalis'. These structures mainly control the subconscious organisation of behaviour and physiology, with important roles in mating, reproductive physiology, social behaviours, threat monitoring, aggression, fear, energy balance, and the like. By contrast, while the cerebral cortex is easy to assay with neuroimaging, it's not necessarily the business end of the brain when it comes to the kind of behavioural differences we are interested in.

The focus on neuroimaging is thus a bit of a red herring in the sex-difference wars. The technology is simply not able to detect all the differences that might exist in neural circuitry between men and women, nor are scientists able to interpret those differences it can detect, let alone resolve the issue of whether any purportedly associated differences we observe in male and female behaviour are due to biological or cultural factors.

An equally contested area in investigating the basis of

behavioural sex differences is whether differences in psychological traits, including personality traits such as conscientiousness, aggressiveness, impulsivity, risk-taking, nurturance and so on, might drive observable differences in behaviour. If such traits – thought to reflect some basic brain processes – differ consistently between males and females, then that would seem to favour a biological explanation for differences in behaviour. But, as with neuroanatomical differences, merely observing differences in such traits is not sufficient to settle the debate as to their origins or effects. What is observed is a spectrum – from traits where sex differences have a clear, conserved biological basis and strongly drive behaviours, to traits whose origins are murkier and the link to behaviour far more tenuous. The traits with strongest evidence of biological origins are, not surprisingly, the ones most closely linked to reproduction and mating strategies.

Sexual preference is the most obvious. So obvious that it is often overlooked, as if it just happens by default that some human beings are attracted to males and some to females. Those states don't just happen. They are the [outcome](#) of a programme of masculinisation or feminisation of neural circuits that mediates sexual attraction, with principles and mechanisms well-worked-out in other mammals. Physical aggression is also closely tied to mating strategies, and shows strong sex differences. Human males are far more physically violent than females, across all cultures, committing the vast majority of serious assaults and homicides, and making up the vast majority of the victims. A similar sex difference is observed in many mammals, including most primates, in accord with the ecological pressures of competition for mates.

These differences in sexuality and aggression relate closely to reproductive strategies and behaviours; they are expected from an evolutionary perspective, have direct correlates in other species, and are associated with specific neural mechanisms that are beginning to be well-elucidated in model organisms. There is no

good reason why a biological origin for these differences should be controversial.

But then such differences are also not really the things that much of the debate hangs on. Of much more relevance are possible differences in cognitive abilities, personality traits, aptitudes and interests.

Much has been written, over the centuries, about women's supposedly inferior cognitive abilities. In fact, modern IQ tests show no difference in mean scores between men and women (though men show higher variance), and in many countries girls now regularly outperform boys in academic exams. There are, however, measurable [differences](#) in very specific cognitive abilities, such as a male advantage in mental rotation of three-dimensional objects, and a female advantage in verbal fluency. The difference in mental rotation shows up early, by age four or five, is moderate in size, and universally observed across cultures. Much is made of these differences. An OECD [report](#) in 2017 reviewed evidence that 'students with higher scores on tests of spatial ability were substantially more likely to enter careers in science and mathematics', yet the same report summarised data showing that spatial ability was fundamentally malleable, and could be improved by training and experience, suggesting an interplay of nature and nurture.

## **Even in the most individualistic societies, there are limits on the extent to which we independently create ourselves**

There are other consistent sex differences in [personality](#) traits. In particular, females average slightly higher on the broad traits of neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness. More specifically, males tend to score higher on traits such as assertiveness, sensation-seeking and dominance, while females

average higher on gregariousness, sociability and nurturance. In psychometric [analyses](#) of interests, females consistently show a greater interest in people, on average, while males show a greater interest in things. Unlike sexual behaviours and aggression, most of these cognitive and personality traits are not so convincingly linked to reproductive success or to ecological roles. And, since they don't have direct correlates in other species, we know much less about their biological underpinnings. They *might* have biological origins (since genetic differences influence these traits in a general sense), but there is also plenty of scope for cultural effects to have an important influence.

If the origins of these differences remain unclear, so too do their consequences. And yet arguing about the kinds of effects that these small average differences in psychological traits have on patterns of real-world behaviour and societal outcomes are the real flashpoints in this debate: are women suited to careers in STEM areas or not? Is the pay gap due to differences in traits such as agreeableness? Generally speaking, [correlations](#) between personality traits and a variety of consequential social outcomes – happiness, educational attainment, job performance, health, longevity – are weak, and the predictive power for individuals is very low. And that's when we look at the full range of trait values across the whole population. But the sex differences discussed here are tiny relative to that range, meaning that any predictive value for outcomes will be correspondingly reduced.

When scientific findings are interpreted for media consumption or popular debate, the complexity and dynamism underlying the relationship between personality traits is typically underplayed. Our behaviour is not simply determined on a moment-to-moment basis by the tuning of these parameters. [Innate](#) predispositions provide a baseline – some initial tendencies to behave in one general way or another. And these initial tendencies [influence](#) how we interact with the world and subjectively experience it, as well as the [kinds](#) of environments we select and build. They can have

a cumulative [effect](#) on how our individual habits and characters emerge, how we adapt to our environments, and the expectations we set of ourselves. But the idea that this just happens without any outside influence is naive.

Even in the most individualistic societies, there are limits on the extent to which we independently create ourselves. Societal outcomes are not simply an expression of the free choices of individuals, as some commentators seem to imply. With regard to sex differences, we have to [consider](#) the wider [factors](#) in play, including group dynamics, gender affiliation, the presence or absence of role models, societal norms and expectations, outright sexual discrimination and other systematic effects of culture.

For some behaviours, these forces can collectively act to amplify small group-average differences in psychology and habit-formation by setting expectations that become self-reinforcing. For example, aggressiveness (of a nonviolent nature) might be rewarded in males, while being discouraged in females. For other differences, such as choice of professions, culture might impose arbitrary norms and expectations that don't reflect innate biological differences at all.

Given how little we know about how all these factors interact, it seems wildly premature and more than a little arrogant to assert that the small differences observed on lab-based measures of psychological traits are a sufficient explanation of observed differences in societal outcomes. We don't have a 'get out of evolution free' card, but we are also not meat robots whose behaviour is determined by the positions of a few knobs and switches, independent of any societal forces. One thing is clear: we'll never get to grips with the complexity of the interactive mechanisms in play if the debate remains polarised. We need a synthesis of findings and perspectives from genetics, neuroscience, psychology and sociology, not a war between them.

## CHAPTER 10

---

# *Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argument in Support of Social Constructionism*

### **Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argument in Support of Social Constructionism**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)

**Social constructionism** is a theory of knowledge that holds that characteristics typically thought to be immutable and solely biological—such as gender, race, class, ability, and sexuality—are products of human definition and interpretation shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Subramaniam 2010). As such, social constructionism highlights the ways in which cultural categories—like “men,” “women,” “black,” “white”—are concepts created, changed, and reproduced through historical processes within institutions and culture. We do not mean to say that bodily variation among individuals does not exist, but that we construct categories based on certain bodily features, we attach meanings to these categories, and then we place people into the categories

by considering their bodies or bodily aspects. For example, by the **one-drop rule**, regardless of their appearance, individuals with any African ancestor are considered black. In contrast, racial conceptualization and thus racial categories are different in Brazil, where many individuals with African ancestry are considered to be white. This shows how identity categories are not based on strict biological characteristics, but on the social perceptions and meanings that are assumed. Categories are not “natural” or fixed and the boundaries around them are always shifting—they are contested and redefined in different historical periods and across different societies. Therefore, the social constructionist perspective is concerned with the *meaning* created through defining and categorizing groups of people, experience, and reality in cultural contexts.

What does it mean to be “heterosexual” in contemporary US society? Did it mean the same thing in the late 19th century? As historian of human sexuality Jonathon Ned Katz shows in *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (1999), the word “heterosexual” was originally coined by Dr. James Kiernan in 1892, but its meaning and usage differed drastically from contemporary understandings of the term. Kiernan thought of “hetero-sexuals” as not defined by their attraction to the opposite sex, but by their “inclinations to both sexes.” Furthermore, Kiernan thought of the heterosexual as someone who “betrayed inclinations to ‘abnormal methods of gratification’” (Katz 1995). In other words, heterosexuals were those who were attracted to both sexes and engaged in sex for pleasure, not for reproduction. Katz further points out that this definition of the heterosexual lasted within middle-class cultures in the United States until

the 1920s, and then went through various radical reformulations up to the current usage.

Looking at this historical example makes visible the process of the social construction of heterosexuality. First of all, the example shows how social construction occurs within institutions—in this case, a medical doctor created a new category to describe a particular type of sexuality, based on existing medical knowledge at the time. “Hetero-sexuality” was initially a medical term that defined a deviant type of sexuality. Second, by seeing how Kiernan—and middle class culture, more broadly—defined “hetero-sexuality” in the 19th century, it is possible to see how drastically the meanings of the concept have changed over time. Typically, in the United States in contemporary usage, “heterosexuality” is thought to mean “normal” or “good”—it is usually the invisible term defined by what is thought to be its opposite, homosexuality. However, in its initial usage, “hetero-sexuality” was thought to counter the norm of reproductive sexuality and be, therefore, deviant. This gets to the third aspect of social constructionism. That is, cultural and historical contexts shape our definition and understanding of concepts. In this case, the norm of reproductive sexuality—having sex not for pleasure, but to have children—defines what types of sexuality are regarded as “normal” or “deviant.” Fourth, this case illustrates how categorization shapes human experience, behavior, and interpretation of reality. To be a “heterosexual” in middle class culture in the US in the early 1900s was not something desirable to be—it was not an identity that most people would have wanted to inhabit. The very definition of “hetero-sexual” as deviant, because it violated reproductive sexuality, defined “proper” sexual behavior as that which was reproductive and not pleasure-centered.

Social constructionist approaches to understanding the world challenge the essentialist or biological determinist understandings that typically underpin the “common sense” ways in which we think about race, gender, and sexuality. **Essentialism** is the idea that the characteristics of persons or groups are significantly influenced by biological factors, and are therefore largely similar in all human cultures and historical periods. A key assumption of essentialism is that “a given truth is a necessary natural part of the individual and object in question” (Gordon and Abbott 2002). In other words, an essentialist understanding of sexuality would argue that not only do all people have a sexual orientation, but that an individual's sexual orientation does not vary across time or place. In this example, “sexual orientation” is a given “truth” to individuals—it is thought to be inherent, biologically determined, and essential to their being.

Essentialism typically relies on a biological determinist theory of identity. **Biological determinism** can be defined as a general theory, which holds that a group's biological or genetic makeup shapes its social, political, and economic destiny (Subramaniam 2014). For example, “sex” is typically thought to be a biological “fact,” where bodies are classified into two categories, male and female. Bodies in these categories are assumed to have “sex”-distinct chromosomes, reproductive systems, hormones, and sex characteristics. However, “sex” has been defined in many different ways, depending on the context within which it is defined. For example, feminist law professor Julie Greenberg (2002) writes that in the late 19th century and early 20th century, “when reproductive function was considered one of a woman's essential characteristics, the medical community decided that the presence or absence of ovaries was the ultimate criterion of sex” (Greenberg 2002: 113). Thus, sexual difference was produced through the **heteronormative** assumption that women are defined by their ability to have children. Instead of assigning sex based on the presence or absence of ovaries, medical practitioners in the

contemporary US typically assign sex based on the appearance of genitalia.

Differential definitions of sex point to two other primary aspects of the social construction of reality. First, it makes apparent how even the things commonly thought to be “natural” or “essential” in the world are socially constructed. Understandings of “nature” change through history and across place according to systems of human knowledge. Second, the social construction of difference occurs within relations of power and privilege. Sociologist Abby Ferber (2009) argues that these two aspects of the social construction of difference cannot be separated, but must be understood together. Discussing the construction of racial difference, she argues that inequality and oppression actually produce ideas of essential racial difference. Therefore, racial categories that are thought to be “natural” or “essential” are created within the context of racialized power relations—in the case of African-Americans, that includes slavery, laws regulating interracial sexual relationships, lynching, and white supremacist discourse. Social constructionist analyses seek to better understand the processes through which racialized, gendered, or sexualized differentiations occur, in order to untangle the power relations within them.

Notions of disability are similarly socially constructed within the context of ableist power relations. The **medical model of disability** frames body and mind differences and perceived challenges as flaws that need fixing at the individual level. The **social model of disability** shifts the focus to the disabling aspects of society for individuals with **impairments** (physical, sensory or mental differences), where the society disables those with impairments (Shakespeare 2006). **Disability**, then, refers to a form of oppression where individuals understood as having impairments are imagined to be inferior to those without impairments, and impairments are devalued and unwanted. This perspective manifests in structural arrangements that limit access

for those with impairments. A **critical disability perspective** critiques the idea that **nondisability** is natural and normal—an ableist sentiment, which frames the person rather than the society as the problem.

What are the implications of a social constructionist approach to understanding the world? Because social constructionist analyses examine categories of difference as fluid, dynamic, and changing according to historical and geographical context, a social constructionist perspective suggests that existing inequalities are neither inevitable nor immutable. This perspective is especially useful for the activist and emancipatory aims of feminist movements and theories. By centering the processes through which inequality and power relations produce racialized, sexualized, and gendered difference, social constructionist analyses challenge the pathologization of minorities who have been thought to be essentially or inherently inferior to privileged groups. Additionally, social constructionist analyses destabilize the categories that organize people into hierarchically ordered groups through uncovering the historical, cultural, and/or institutional origins of the groups under study. In this way, social constructionist analyses challenge the categorical underpinnings of inequalities by revealing their production and reproduction through unequal systems of knowledge and power.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

## CHAPTER 11

---

# *Argument that Gender is Not a Social Construct*

### **Argument that Gender is Not a Social Construct**

THIS ARTICLE WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE IRISH TIMES ON 04/04/2013. THE ARTICLE IS REPRODUCED HERE WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE IRISH TIMES AND OF THE AUTHOR PROFESSOR WILLIAM REVILLE

## **GENDER IS NOT A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT**

---

THERE IS A STRONG BIOLOGICAL BASIS TO GENDER AND IT CANNOT BE HEALTHY TO FRUSTRATE SUCH TENDENCIES

---

**By William Reville** <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/science/gender-is-not-a-social-construct-1.1347741>

---

Attention male readers. How would you like it if Michael Noonan introduced a tax on men in reparation for the violence that men have visited on society over the ages?

Well, such a law was proposed by a radical feminist/green lobby

in Sweden, where they take gender equality seriously. Unfortunately, I think they are getting it very wrong.

This law was never close to being enacted, but Sweden is making progress with gender-equality in other areas, as reported by Christina Hoff Sommers in *The Atlantic* in December. For example, Swedish toy company catalogues must show images of boys playing with dolls and girls with guns, and vice versa, and in 2012 the Swedes introduced the genderless pronoun “hen” instead of “han” (he) and “hon” (she).

In Stockholm, a state-sponsored preschool Egalia tries to obliterate the male/female distinction among children. The children are not called boys and girls, but friends, and stories like two male giraffes parenting abandoned crocodile eggs have replaced classic fairy tales such as Cinderella. The Swedish Green party want Egalia to become the norm.

Males and females are different and behave differently from an early age. Sex stereotyped play is a persistent difference – boys generally prefer rough-and-tumble play and girls prefer nurturing play. This also holds across species; monkeys behave similarly.

Biology plays a major role in determining male and female patterns of behaviour. Sex hormones come in two varieties, male and female. Males are predominantly exposed to male sex hormones in the womb and throughout life, and females to female sex hormones. These hormones condition play behaviour.

Female monkeys exposed prenatally to male sex hormones later prefer male rough-and-tumble play. The human genetic disease congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) exposes the female foetus to unusually large amounts of male sex hormone and toy-preference studies have shown that girls with CAH prefer to play with cars than with dolls.

Few deny that biology plays a major role in determining gender-specific play. However, those who make proposals such as described for Sweden argue that “we should not accept

biology as destiny” and parents/teachers should oppose certain biologically inbuilt tendencies with social conditioning, just as we do in medicine by vaccination or medications.

This view suggests we should treat gender-based behaviour in children as a disease in need of a cure. Such pursuit of gender neutrality would eliminate variety, generally seen as a valuable asset in the biological world and a vital basic element contributing to normal human interrelations.

There is no credible evidence that normal gender-based play behaviour causes any harm. Hoff Sommers quotes psychological evidence that normal boys’ rough-and-tumble play is not aggression but makes the boys happy, is a vital part of social development, and improves their writing skills, imagination and speech. Studies have also shown that the more civilised play of girls contains fantasies just as exciting and intense as boys’ fantasies.

The push in Sweden to eliminate gendered behaviour in children is based on the ideological notion that gender is mostly socially constructed. There is undoubtedly a social element to gender, but the evidence for a strong biological basis is undeniable and it cannot be healthy to frustrate strong biological tendencies. You can change gendered play in children by social conditioning but it bounces back when there is any slackening off in the conditioning. One is reminded of the 1967 case of David Reimer from Canada (reported as the John/Joan case). Reimer lost his penis in a circumcision accident.

To compensate, he was clinically castrated and treated with female hormones, and was raised as a girl, on the ideological assumption that gender is socially constructed.

But Reimer always identified as a boy and became a tragically unhappy adolescent. The case is recounted in the book *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl* by John Colapinto (New York, Harper Collins, 2000).

The preponderance of scientific (biological and psychological)

evidence indicates that the social gender engineering proposed in Sweden is wrong. Male and female are different but equal and the equality agenda is damaged rather than served by trying to eliminate difference.

William Reville is an emeritus professor of biochemistry and public awareness of science officer at UCC. <http://understandingscience.ucc.ie>

The following sources were drawn on for the development of the above article:

1. You Can Give a Boy a Doll, but You Can't Make Him Play with It by Christina Hoff Sommers, *The Atlantic*, December 6, 2012.
2. Sex Differences in the Brain by Doreen Kimura. *Scientific American*, 1999.
3. *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl*. John Colapinto. New York, Harper Collins

**CHAPTER 12**

---

# *Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argues Time to Move Beyond "Gender Is Socially Constructed"*

## **Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argues Time to Move Beyond "Gender Is Socially Constructed"**

MICHAEL MASCOLO PH.D. ,  
[HTTPS://WWW.PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM/US/BLOG/  
OLD-SCHOOL-PARENTING-MODERN-DAY-FAMILIES/201907/  
TIME-MOVE-BEYOND-GENDER-IS-SOCIALLY-CONSTRUCTED](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/old-school-parenting-modern-day-families/201907/time-move-beyond-gender-is-socially-constructed)

## TIME TO MOVE BEYOND “GENDER IS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED”

---

### CONTRADICTIONS OF SEX AND GENDER

---

By: Michael Mascolo Ph.D.

---

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/old-school-parenting-modern-day-families/201907/time-move-beyond-gender-is-socially-constructed>

---

We often hear that “[gender](#) is socially constructed.” What does that mean? Is it true?

The popular idea that gender is socially constructed might be summed up as follows:

*There is a difference between “sex” and “gender.” Sex is “biological” while gender is “psychological,” “social,” or “cultural.” A person’s gender can be different from a person’s sex. Gender is thus “socially constructed” in the sense that, unlike biological sex, gender is a product of society. If society determines what is masculine or feminine, then society can change what is considered masculine, feminine, or anything in between. No one needs to be locked into fixed gender categories. Any individual is free to identify their gender as they see fit.*

Although it is important, the concept of *gender* is an imprecise one. Depending on how it is used, the concept of gender can be illuminating, clarifying, confusing, contradictory, or downright incoherent. To illustrate, let us begin by examining some typical definitions of the concepts of sex, gender, and gender [identity](#).

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines sex as “a person’s biological status ... typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female.” It defines gender as “the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex.”

Gender identity refers to:

[a] person's deeply-felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or an alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender non-conforming, boygirl, ladyboy) which may or may not correspond to a person's sex assigned at birth or to a person's primary or secondary sex characteristics. Since gender identity is internal, a person's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

On the surface, these definitions appear quite reasonable. However, they mask a series of deep contradictions that tend to occur when people talk about gender as a social construction. If we are going to be able to have constructive conversations about gender and society, it is important to unmask these contradictions. Here are but a few:

**Gender cannot simultaneously be socially constructed and inherent to the individual.**

In the APA definition, sex refers to the biological reproductive apparatus, while gender refers to cultural expectations and norms. Drawing on this distinction, when people say that gender is socially constructed, they tend to assert that sex is independent of gender. However, if gender is an arbitrary creation of society, how is it possible for gender identity to be an "internal" and "inherent" sense of self? It is not possible for gender to simultaneously be an arbitrary product of culture and an inherent experience of the individual. If gender comes from the culture, how can it also be an inherent property of the individual person?

**Gender identity cannot be simultaneously self-chosen and the product of socialization.**

The idea that gender is socially constructed is often taken to mean that gender identities are the product of socialization. This statement stands in contradiction to the idea that gender identities arise from the process of self-identification—that it is the individual who decides upon gender identity.

What is the source of one's gender identity? Is it an experience that resides within the self? If so, then it cannot be a mere result of socialization. If one's sense of gender is merely socialized, what role does the person play in self-identification? If there is no personal basis for identifying one's gender, gender identification would itself become an arbitrary process.

**Gender identity cannot simultaneously be invisible and socially verifiable.**

If, as the APA definition maintains, gender identity is something

that is not necessarily visible to others, how can we ever verify a person's claim to a given gender identity? A social identity is not the kind of thing that can be determined by a solitary self. Social identities are verified and validated in social relations. If this were not the case, we would be compelled to accept any identity claim made by any individual exclusively on the basis of self-assertion alone.

This is not how the construction of identity works. In order to gain credibility with others (and to the self), any identity claim must be accompanied by some sort of public expression that can be shared with others. This is not to say that people cannot and do not identify themselves in terms of prevailing gender categories; it only means that societies do not accept identity claims on the basis of self-identification alone. Identity claims are created and validated in social exchanges where people express their identities not simply in words, but also in deeds and actions.

**Gender cannot be both independent of sex and defined with reference to sex.**

The APA defines gender identity as one's sense of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or an alternative gender. To say that one's experience of self may not comport with one's assigned sex is to make a distinction between sex and gender. However, the capacity to discriminate sex from gender does not make one independent of the other.

Terms like male, female, boy, girl, man, and woman have their historical origins in social roles that have been organized with reference to sex. The meanings of boy and girl, masculine, feminine, and androgyny, while not fixed by sex, are nonetheless defined with reference to sex. It follows to the extent that [sex-linked](#) biological processes contribute to the development of psychological differences between people; those psychological processes play a role in the social meanings that define gender.

**The human experience is not divided into separate biological and socially constructed parts.**

The problem with the popular concept that "sex is biological" and "gender is cultural" is the idea that sex and gender reflect independent aspects of the person. However, there are no separable biological and cultural aspects of a person.

Acting and experiencing do not have separate biological and cultural components. Biology and culture influence each other; they make each other up. For example, the act of writing is a

historically and culturally constructed process; however, it is made possible by the biology of the opposable thumb. In all things, biology and culture make each other up. The same is true for the relation between biology and culture as they relate to the construction of gender.

**The mere difference between gender and sex doesn't mean that one replaces the other.**

Sex is the biological apparatus. The construction of gender identity is a psychological process. (It is also a biological process; all psychological processes are biological processes—but not all biological processes are psychological processes.)

So, we have two categories here—not one. To identify myself in terms of a particular gender category does not take away my sex. One is not simply one's sex—but then again, one is not simply one's gender identity either. If sex and gender are different, then one doesn't replace the other. Self-identification is but one form of identification. It doesn't replace identification by other means.

**Gender politics**

People are confused and divided in political discussions about sex and gender. Much of the debate over gender is ideological in nature. Some [fear](#) that if gender is not “socially constructed,” the political [goals](#) of gender equality will lose traction and credibility. Others argue that saying that gender is “socially constructed” is to deny the contributions of biological “nature.” Neither ideological extreme is supported by psychological research.

Are there psychological differences between and among sexes (or genders)? Phrased in this way, these are not interesting questions. It makes no sense to ask about the “psychological nature” of males, females, intersex individuals, or of individuals who identify themselves in terms of prevailing gender categories. That is because there is no “nature” that is independent of social context; there is no social organization that is independent of biology.

Persons are not fixed beings with fixed natures. If we want to understand persons, we must look at them as individuals who develop over time as products of complex relations between their biology and their cultures.

## CHAPTER 13

---

# *Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argues There are 3 Fatal Flaws in the "Gender as a Social Construct" Position*

### **Is Gender Socially Constructed? - Argues There are 3 Fatal Flaws in the "Gender as a Social Construct" Position**

ADAM GROZA & BENJAMIN ARBOUR, 3 FATAL FLAWS IN THE "GENDER AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT" POSITION, [HTTPS://ERLC.COM/RESOURCE-LIBRARY/ARTICLES/3-FATAL-FLAWS-IN-THE-GENDER-AS-SOCIAL-CONSTRUCT-POSITION/](https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/3-fatal-flaws-in-the-gender-as-social-construct-position/)

## 3 FATAL FLAWS IN THE “GENDER AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCT” POSITION

---

By: Adam Groza & Benjamin Arbour

---

<https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/3-fatal-flaws-in-the-gender-as-social-construct-position/>

---

Typical Southern Baptists are barraged with the message that gender is a social construct, which means that gender is something subjective and not the result of nature, purpose, or design. They hear this message on television, in movies, in popular songs, in schools, and even in corporate training material. Southern Baptist churches need to educate their congregants to resist this argument and tear down these lies (2 Cor. 10:5).

Society is at a crossroads—either God institutes biological sex by which a person’s gender is established (male and female, see Gen. 5:2), or gender is a social construct and thus open to be revised, rejected, or assigned.

### Fatal flaws

---

What are the fatal flaws to the idea that gender is a social construct, or, more specifically, what’s wrong with the way that transgenderism is promoted?

Start with how people tend to question their gender. The common story we’ve probably all heard goes something like this: “My child was born a biological male, and we named him Christopher, but from an early age, he only wanted to dress in pink and play with dolls. So we knew early on that our child was really a girl, and eventually, we allowed Chrissy to identify as female.”

#### **Flaw number one**

Can you spot the problem? If gender is a social construct, then playing with dolls and preferring pink instead of blue doesn’t count as evidence of some individuals having a different gender identity

than their biological sex. Assuming what the transgender community would have us believe about gender as a social construct, dolls and pinkness aren't essential components of femininity, nor do G.I. Joe's and blueness represent essential marks of masculinity. Pointing to meaningless and "oppressive" social constructs as evidence of one's real gender is incoherent.

How can someone claim to have an innate gender identity if gender is socially constructed?

Advocates of the social construct theory need to follow through on their own logic: If gender is a social construct, then preferences concerning societally constructed gender norms are irrelevant in determining one's gender. So the next time people tell you that someone determines their gender by preferring pink over blue, or ballet over football, tell those people that assuming the very thing they claim to deny isn't a good way to convince us that their position makes any sense. Perhaps we can re-state it this way: How can someone claim to have an innate gender identity if gender is socially constructed?

### **Flaw number two**

Well, you might ask, if not for pink over blue, how does a person determine their gender? This important question leads us to another fatal flaw in the social construct theory of gender. If gender is a social construct, and if gender cues (colors, social preferences, etc.) are arbitrary and unrelated to one's real gender, then the only way for a person to determine their gender is to decide for oneself, or choose one's gender based on gender stereotypes present throughout a culture. Previous generations thought they had it tough, having to choose a mate, a career, a place to live, etc. Future generations must now choose whether or not to be he, she, them, it, we, zie, or some designation hitherto unknown in this world of socially constructed gender.

But those keeping score at home might object, "Wait a minute, I thought gender was a social construct, not an individual construct!" Gender norms are partially constructed. That's why gender norms change from one culture to the next. Society establishes the rules for the game, not the individual. You no more get to choose your gender than you do your race, height, or species. So what are the agreed-upon social means and mechanisms by which society assigns gender to people in this unfolding dystopia?

I suppose we'll be informed when a decision has been reached.

### **Flaw number three**

Yet another fatal flaw with the social construct theory of gender is the claim that the newfound liberation of otherwise closeted transgender people is only recognizing a group of people that already existed in the shadows, and not creating a group of people that didn't otherwise exist. Christians might suspect that all the talk about transgenderism will somehow have the effect of increasing the number of transgender people. Or, more bluntly, all this confused talk about gender oozing out of American culture might invite additional confusion on the part of individuals. Advocates of the social construct theory dismiss this concern as bigoted and uninformed.

But is it? To answer that question, we just have to follow the logic. If gender is a social construct, then the category of "transgender" must also be a social construct. And, if transgenderism is socially constructed, then society can construct transgender people based on society's understanding of gender stereotypes.

Funny how ideas have consequences.

### **The good news about gender**

---

Now for the good news. Gender is not a social construct. Rather, gender is divinely instituted, and it's an essential aspect of personal identity that follows from biological reality. This doesn't mean things aren't complicated, because sin affects everything in our lives. "Everything," unfortunately, includes chromosomes, hormones, neuro-pathways, and other biological aspects of humanity. And it's likely that some questions will remain unanswered until we have resurrected bodies in the eternal state.

## CHAPTER 14

---

# *Gender Socialization*

### **Gender Socialization**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **GENDER SOCIALIZATION**

---

Gender socialization is the process by which males and females are informed about the norms and behaviors associated with their sex.

### *KEY POINTS*

---

- Gender socialization is the process by which individuals are taught how to socially behave in accordance with their assigned gender, which is assigned at birth based on their biological [sex](#).
- Today it is largely believed that most gender differences are attributed to differences in socialization, rather than genetic and biological factors.
- Gender stereotypes can be a result of gender

socialization: girls and boys are expected to act in certain ways that are socialized from birth. Children and adults who do not conform to gender stereotypes are often ostracized by peers for being different.

- While individuals are typically socialized into viewing gender as a masculine-feminine binary, there are individuals who challenge and complicate this notion. These individuals believe that gender is fluid and not a rigid binary.

## TERMS

---

- **gender** The socio-cultural phenomenon of the division of people into various categories such as male and female, with each having associated roles, expectations, stereotypes, etc.
  - **Gender socialization** The process of educating and instructing males and females as to the norms, behaviors, values, and beliefs of group membership as men or women.
  - **sex** Either of two main divisions (female or male) into which many organisms can be placed, according to reproductive function or organs.
- 

Sociologists and other social scientists generally attribute many of the behavioral differences between genders to socialization. Socialization is the process of transferring norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors to group members. The most intense period of socialization is during childhood, when adults who are members of a particular cultural group instruct young children on how to behave in order to comply with social norms. Gender is included

in this process; individuals are taught how to socially behave in accordance with their assigned gender, which is assigned at birth based on their biological sex (for instance, male babies are given the gender of “boy”, while female babies are given the gender of “girl”). Gender socialization is thus the process of educating and instructing males and females as to the norms, behaviors, values, and beliefs of group membership .

### ROSIE THE RIVETER

---

“Rosie the Riveter” was an iconic symbol of the American homefront in WWII. The entrance of women into the workforce (and into traditionally male roles) marked a departure from gender roles due to wartime necessity.

Preparations for gender socialization begin even before the birth of the child. One of the first questions people ask of expectant parents is the sex of the child. This is the beginning of a social categorization process that continues throughout life. Preparations for the birth often take the infant’s sex into consideration (e.g., painting the room blue if the child is a boy, pink for a girl). Today it is largely believed that most gender differences are attributed to differences in socialization, rather than genetic and biological factors.

Gender stereotypes can be a result of gender socialization. Girls and boys are expected to act in certain ways, and these ways are socialized from birth by many parents (and society). For example, girls are expected to be clean and quiet, while boys are messy and loud. As children get older, gender stereotypes become more apparent in styles of dress and choice of leisure activities. Boys and girls who do not conform to gender stereotypes are usually ostracized by same-age peers for being different. This can lead to negative effects, such as lower self-esteem.

In Western contexts, gender socialization operates as a binary, or

a concept that is exclusively comprised of two parts. In other words, individuals are socialized into conceiving of their gender as either masculine (male) or feminine (female). Identities are therefore normatively constructed along this single parameter. However, some individuals do not feel that they fall into the gender binary and they choose to question or challenge the male-masculine / female-feminine binary. For example, individuals that identify as *transgender* feel that their gender identity does not match their biological sex. Individuals that identify as *genderqueer* challenge classifications of masculine and feminine, and may identify as somewhere other than male and female, in between male and female, a combination of male and female, or a third (or forth, or fifth, etc.) gender altogether. These identities demonstrate the fluidity of gender, which is so frequently thought to be biological and immutable. Gender fluidity also shows how gender norms are learned and either accepted or rejected by the socialized individual.

**CHAPTER 15**

---

## *Gender Identity in Everyday Life*

**Gender Identity in Everyday Life**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

**GENDER IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

---

Gender identity is one's sense of one's own gender. It is the result of socialization, but it also has a biological basis.

---

**KEY POINTS**

---

- Gender identity typically falls on a gender binary—individuals are expected to exclusively identify either as male or female. However, some individuals believe that this binary model is illegitimate and identify as a third, or mixed, gender.

- Individuals whose gender identity aligns with their sex organs are said to be cisgender. Transgender individuals are those whose gender identity does not align with their sex organs.
- Gender identity discourse derives from medical and psychological conceptions of gender. There is vigorous debate over biological versus environmental causes of the development of one's gender identity.
- As gender identities come to be more disputed, new legal frontiers are opening on the basis that a male/female gender binary, as written into the law, discriminates against individuals who either identify as the opposite of their biological sex or who do not identify as either male or female.
- The extreme cultural variation in notions of gender indicate the socially constructed nature of gender identity.

## TERMS

---

- gender binary A view of gender whereby people are categorized exclusively as either male or female, often basing gender on biological sex.
- transgender Not identifying with culturally conventional gender roles and categories of male or female; having changed gender identity from male to female or female to male, or identifying with elements of both, or having some other gender identity.
- cisgender Identifying with or experiencing a gender the same as one's biological sex or that is affirmed by society,

e.g. being both male-gendered & male-sexed.

---

### EXAMPLE

---

- The berdaches, or the Two-Spirit People, are indigenous North Americans who, although biologically male, assume one of many mixed gender roles. These “third” gender roles involve engaging in work and wearing clothing associated with both men and women. This could include medicine, fortune-telling, conveying oral traditions and songs, and match-making.
- 

Gender identity is one’s sense of being male, female, or a third gender. Gender identity typically falls on a gender binary—individuals are expected to exclusively identify either as male or female. However, some individuals believe that this binary model is illegitimate and identify as a third, or mixed, gender. Gender identity is socially constructed, yet it still pertains to one’s sense of self. Gender identity is not only about how one perceives one’s own gender, but also about how one presents one’s gender to the public.

### CISGENDER AND TRANSGENDER

---

Individuals whose gender identity aligns with their sex organs are said to be cisgender. Transgender individuals are those whose gender identity does not align with their sex organs. These people generally dress according to how they feel but do not make an

drastic change within their sexual organs. Transsexuals, however, take drastic measures to assume their believed identity. This includes hormone therapy and sexual reassignment operations. Recently, there has been a growing gender/queer movement consisting of individuals who do not feel that their sex organs are mismatched to their gender identity, but who still wish to trouble the notion of a gender binary, considering it overly simplistic and misrepresentative.

## CAUSES OF CONFUSION IN GENDER IDENTITY

---

What causes individuals to sense a sort of confusion between their biological gender and their gender identity? This question is hotly contested, with no clear answer. Some scientists argue that the sense of confusion is a biological result of the pre- and post-natal swinging of hormone levels and genetic regulation. Sociologists tend to emphasize the environmental impetuses for gender identity. Certainly, socialization, or the process of transferring norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors to group members, plays a significant part in how individuals learn and internalize gender roles and subsequently impact their gender identity.

Though the medical emphasis in some conversations about gender identity is frequently scrutinized by sociologists, there is clearly some biological basis to gender, even if it has more to do with appearances and social presentation than identity formation. Women have two X chromosomes, where men have one X and one Y chromosome. However, despite the deep [relationship](#) to biology, gender identity cannot only be biologically determined. However, gender identity has a larger social component that needs to be considered. For example, although a person may be biologically male, "he" may feel more comfortable with a female identity, which is a social construction based on how he feels, not his physical makeup.

## GENDER IDENTITIES AND LAW

---

As gender identities come to be more disputed, new legal frontiers are opening on the basis that a male/female gender binary, as written into the law, discriminates against individuals who either identify as the opposite of their biological sex or who identify as neither male nor female. On college campuses, gender-restrictive dorm housing is facing opposition by individuals who identify as neither a man nor a woman. Many public spaces and workplaces are instituting gender-neutral bathroom facilities. Gender identity has become a piece of international law as a branch of human rights doctrines. The Yogyakarta Principles, drafted by international legal scholars in 2006, provide a definition of gender identity in its preamble. In the Principles “gender identity” refers to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the biological sex assigned at birth, including the person’s sense of the body and other expressions of gender.

## GENDER IDENTITIES ACROSS CULTURES

---

Gender identities, and the malleability of the gender binary, vary across cultures. In some Polynesian societies, fa’afafine are considered to be a third gender alongside male and female. Fa’afafine are accepted as a natural gender and are neither looked down upon nor discriminated against. They are biologically male, but dress and behave in a manner that Polynesians typically consider female. Fa’afafine are often physiologically unable to reproduce. Fa’afafine also reinforce their femininity by claiming to be only attracted to and receiving sexual attention from heterosexual men.

In the Indian subcontinent, a hijra is usually considered to be neither male nor female. The hijra form a third gender, although

they do not enjoy the same acceptance and respect as individuals who identify along the gender binary.

The xanith form an accepted third gender in Oman, a society that also holds a gender binary as a social norm. The xanith are male, homosexual prostitutes whose dressing is male, featuring pastel colors rather than the white clothes traditionally worn by men, but their mannerisms are coded as female. Xanith can mingle with women where men cannot. However, similar to other men in Oman, xanith can marry women and prove their masculinity by consummating the marriage. This extreme cultural variation in notions of gender indicate the socially constructed nature of gender identity.

**CHAPTER 16**

---

## *Gender Roles in the U.S.*

**Gender Roles in the U.S.**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

**GENDER ROLES IN THE U.S.**

---

Gender roles refer to the set of social and behavioral norms that are considered to be appropriate for people of a specific sex.

---

**KEY POINTS**

---

- Gender roles are never universal, even within a single country, and they are always historically and culturally contingent.
- Gender role theory emphasizes environmental conditions and the influence of socialization, or the process of transferring norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors to group members, in learning how to behave as a male or female.

- Current trends toward a total integration model of gender roles is reflected in women's education, professional achievement, and family income contributions.

## TERMS

---

- Division of labor A division of labour is the dividing and specializing of cooperative labour into specifically circumscribed tasks and roles.
  - socialization The process of learning one's culture and how to live within it.
  - nuclear family a family unit consisting of at most a father, mother and dependent children.
- 

Gender roles refer to the set of social and behavioral norms that are considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. There has been significant variation in gender roles over cultural and historical spans, and all gender roles are culturally and historically contingent. Much scholarly work on gender roles addresses the debate over the environmental or biological causes for the development of gender roles. The following section seeks to orient the reader to the sociological theorization of the gender role and discuss its application in an American context.

## GENDER AND SOCIAL ROLE THEORY

---

Gender role theory posits that boys and girls learn to perform one's biologically assigned gender through particular behaviors and attitudes. Gender role theory emphasizes the environmental causes of gender roles and the impact of socialization, or the process of transferring norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors to

group members, in learning how to behave as a male or a female. Social role theory proposes that the social structure is the underlying force in distinguishing genders and that sex-differentiated behavior is driven by the division of labor between two sexes within a society. The division of labor creates gender roles, which in turn, lead to gendered social behavior.

## GENDER ROLES IN THE UNITED STATES

---

With the popularization of social constructionist theories of gender roles, it is paramount that one recognize that all assertions about gender roles are culturally and historically contingent. This means that what might be true of gender roles in the United States for one cultural group likely is not true for another cultural group. Similarly, gender roles in the United States have changed drastically over time. There is no such thing as a universal, generalizable statement about gender roles.

One main thread in discussions about gender roles in the United States has been the historical evolution from a single-income family, or a family unit in which one spouse (typically the father) is responsible for the family income, to a dual-income family, or a family unit in which both spouses generate income. Before the rise of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s and the influx of women into the workforce in the 1980s, women were largely responsible for dealing with home matters, while men worked and earned income outside the home. While some claim that this was a sexist structure, others maintain that the structure simply represented a division of labor, or a social system in which a particular segment of the population performs one type of labor and another segment performs another type.

## NUCLEAR FAMILY MODELS

---

In 1955, sociologist Talcott Parsons developed a model of nuclear

families in the United States that addressed gender roles. Family structures vary across cultures and history, and the term *nuclear family* refers to a family unit of two parents and their children. Parsons developed two models of gender roles within the nuclear family. His first model involved total role segregation; men and women would be trained and educated in gender-specific institutions, and high professional qualifications and the workplace would be intended for men. Women would be primarily focused on housekeeping, childcare, and children's education. Male participation in domestic activity would be only partially desired and socially acceptable. Further, in the case of conflict, the man would have the final say. Parsons contrasted this first model with a second that involved the total integration of roles. In the second model, men and women would be educated in the same institutions and study the same content in classes. Outside the educational milieu, women and men would both perceive career to be important, and equal professional opportunities for men and women would be considered socially necessary. Both parties in a marriage would bear responsibility for housework and child rearing. Finally, neither gender would systematically dominate decision making.

## CURRENT TRENDS

---

Of course, neither of Parsons's models accurately described the United States in the 1950s, and neither model accurately describes the United States in the present day. However, total role segregation was closer to the reality of the United States in the 1950s, whereas a total integration of roles is increasingly common in the United States today.

The national trend toward a total integration of gender roles is reflected in women's education, professional achievement, and family income contributions. Currently, more women than men are enrolled in college, and women are expected to earn more

graduate degrees than men over the next several years. In 2005, 22% of American households had two income earners, which suggests the presence of women in the workforce. However, in most contexts, women are still expected to be the primary homemakers, even if they are contributing to household income by working outside the home.

## CHAPTER 17

---

# *The Cross-Cultural Perspective*

### **The Cross-Cultural Perspective**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **THE CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

---

Gender roles vary widely across different cultural contexts.

---

### *KEY POINTS*

---

- It is impossible to generalize what life is like for one woman from assumptions about gender roles in different countries.
- To assess what daily life is like for women, one must learn the particulars about the cultural and historical moment she occupies.
- In Sweden, all working parents are entitled to

sixteen months paid leave per child. To encourage greater paternal involvement in childrearing, a minimum of two months out of the sixteen is required to be used by the “minority” parent, usually the father.

- 62% of Chileans are opposed to full gender equality and believe that women should limit themselves to the roles of mother and wife. Until recently, women lost their right to administer their own assets once they were married, and were required by law to obey their husbands.
- Women in Japan are usually well-educated and employed, though gender dynamics emerge in regards to social pressure to find a husband. Historically, gender has been an important principle of Japanese social stratification, but gender differences have varied over time and within social class.

---

## TERMS

---

- Michelle Bachelet Chile's first female president (2006-2010).
- parental leave A leave of absence from a job for a parent to take care of a baby.

---

Gender roles vary significantly across cultures. Indeed, all gender roles are culturally and historically contingent, meaning that they

cannot be analyzed outside of their cultural and historical contexts. This section attempts to provide a few examples of variation in gender roles and the lives of women in various places around the world. These small glimpses are not universal by any means, but this overview should provide a brief summary of just how much women's lives vary and how much women's lives seem similar across national boundaries.

## GENDER ROLES IN SWEDEN

---

Governments in Europe are typically more active in governing the lives of their citizens than the U.S. government. As such, European governments have used their social powers to encourage equality between men and women. In Sweden, for example, all working parents are entitled to sixteen months paid leave per child, with the cost shared by the government and the employer. To encourage greater paternal involvement in childrearing, a minimum of two months out of the sixteen is required to be used by the "minority" parent, usually the father. Through policies such as parental leave, European states actively work to promote equality between genders in childrearing and professional lives.

## GENDER ROLES IN CHILE

---

As is the case for many women in the United States and in Europe, many women in Chile feel pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. A 2010 study by the United Nations Development Programme found that 62% of Chileans are opposed to full gender equality and expressed the belief that women should limit themselves to the roles of mother and wife. These social barriers to gender equality exist in the face of legal equality.

Chilean law has recently undergone some drastic changes to support gender equality. Until recently, women lost their right to administer their own assets once they were married, with their

husbands receiving all of their wealth. Now, a woman is allowed to maintain her own property. Previously, women were legally required to live with and be faithful and obedient to her husband, but now it is not law.

Chile grants both men and women the right to vote and had one of the first female presidents in the world. From 2006 until 2010, Michelle Bachelet served as Chile's first female president. Women are gaining increasingly prominent positions in various aspects of government. The prominence of female politicians is working to undo traditional stereotypes of women belonging only in the domestic sphere.

## GENDER ROLES IN JAPAN

---

Women in Japan are usually well-educated and employed, though gender dynamics emerge in regards to social pressure to find a husband. Historically, gender has been an important principle of Japanese social stratification but the cultural elaboration of gender differences has, of course, varied over time and within social class. After World War II, the legal position of women was redefined by the occupation authorities. Individual rights were given precedence over obligation to family. Women were guaranteed the right to choose spouses and occupations, to inherit and own property in their own names, and to retain custody of their children. Women were granted the right to vote in 1946. Legally, few barriers to women's equal participation in social and professional life remain in Japan.

However, gender inequality continues in family life, the workplace, and popular values. A common Japanese proverb that continues to influence gender roles is "good wife, wise mother." The proverb reflects the still common social belief, encouraged by men and women alike, that it is in the woman's, her children's, and society's best interests for her to stay home and devote herself to her children. In most households, women are responsible for

family budgets and make independent decisions about the education, careers, and life styles of their families.

Better educational prospects are improving women's professional prospects. Immediately after World War II, the common image of womanhood was that of a secretary who becomes a housewife and mother after marriage. But a new generation of educated woman is emerging who wishes to establish a career in the workforce. Japanese women are joining the labor force in unprecedented numbers such that around 50% of the workforce is comprised of women. One important change is that married women have begun to participate in the work force. In the 1950s, most female employees were young and single; 62% of the female labor force had never been married. By 1987, 68% of the female workforce was married and only 23% had never been married.

Despite changes in the workforce, women are still expected to get married. It is common for unmarried women to experience anxiety and social pressure as a result of her unwed status.

These examples from Sweden, Chile, and Japan hardly scratch the surface of demonstrating some of the extreme variation in gender roles worldwide.

**CHAPTER 18**

---

## *Childhood Socialization*

**Childhood Socialization**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

**CHILDHOOD SOCIALIZATION**

---

Gender roles are taught from infancy through primary socialization, or the type of socialization that occurs in childhood and adolescence.

---

**KEY POINTS**

---

- Gender is instilled through socialization immediately from birth. Consider the gender norms with which society imbues infants. The most archetypal example is the notion that male babies like blue things while female babies like

pink things.

- The example set by an individual's family is also important for socialization. For example, children who grow up in a family with the husband a breadwinner and the wife a homemaker will tend to accept this as the social norm.
- Children sometimes resist gender norms by behaving in ways more commonly associated with the opposite gender.

## TERMS

---

- **socialization** The process of learning one's culture and how to live within it.
  - **primary socialization** The socialization that takes place early in life, as a child and adolescent.
  - **secondary socialization** The socialization that takes place throughout one's life, both as a child and as one encounters new groups that require additional socialization.
- 

Social norms pertaining to gender are developed through socialization, the lifelong process of inheriting, interpreting, and disseminating norms, customs, and ideologies. The process of socialization continues throughout one's life and is constantly renegotiated, but socialization begins as soon as one is born. Sociologists divide socialization into two different parts. Primary socialization takes place early in life, as a child and adolescent. Secondary socialization refers to the socialization that takes place throughout one's life, both as a child and as one encounters new groups that require additional socialization.

Gender is instilled through socialization immediately from birth. Consider the gender norms with which society imbues infants: The most archetypal example is the notion that male babies like blue things while female babies like pink things. When a boy gets a football for his birthday and a girl receives a doll, this also socializes children to accept gender norms. The example set by an individual's family is also important for socialization; children who grow up in a family with the husband a breadwinner and the wife a homemaker will tend to accept this as the social norm, while those who grow up in families with female breadwinners, single parents, or same-sex couples will develop different ideas of gender norms.

Because gender norms are perpetuated immediately upon birth, many sociologists study what happens when children fail to adopt the expected gender norms rather than the norms themselves. This is the standard model of studying deviance in order to understand the norm that undergirds the deviant activity. Children can resist gender norms by insisting on dressing in clothing more typically associated with the other gender, playing with toys more typically associated with the other gender, or having opposite-sex playmates .

## CHAPTER 19

---

# *Adolescent Socialization*

### **Adolescent Socialization**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **ADOLESCENT SOCIALIZATION**

---

Adolescence is a transitional stage of biological, cognitive and social development that prepares individuals for taking on adult roles.

---

### *KEY POINTS*

---

- Identity development is a normative process of change in both the content and structure of how people think about themselves. Identity development encompasses the following notions: self-concept, sense of identity and self-esteem.

- Self-concept is the awareness of the self in relation to a variety of different characteristics and concepts.
- A sense of identity is much more integrated and less conflicting than the self-concept, as an identity is a coherent sense of self that is consistent across different contexts and circumstances past, present and future.
- Self-esteem is one's perception of and feelings toward one's self-concept and identity.
- Familial, peer and sexual/romantic relationships exert a significant influence over adolescent development and can encourage either positive or negative outcomes.

### TERM

---

- identity A coherent sense of self stable across circumstances and including past experiences and future goals.

### EXAMPLE

---

- Bullying is an example of the negative influence that peer groups can have on adolescents. Teenagers who experience constant and severe bullying can suffer from deep psychological distress, which can sometimes lead to suicide. In other cases, bullies can sometimes harm their victims physically, resulting in serious injuries, or even death. Florida's Michael Brewer was lit on fire by a group of bullies. Luckily, he survived the attack.

---

Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development. The period of adolescence is most closely associated with the teenage years, although its physical, psychological and cultural expressions can begin earlier and end later. In studying adolescent development, adolescence can be defined biologically as the physical transition marked by the onset of puberty and the termination of physical growth; cognitively, as changes in the ability to think abstractly and multi-dimensionally; and socially as a period of preparation for adult roles. Major pubertal and biological changes include changes to the sex organs, height, weight and muscle mass, as well as major changes in brain structure and organization. Cognitive advances encompass both increases in knowledge and the ability to think abstractly and to reason more effectively. This is also a time when adolescents start to explore gender identity and sexuality in depth.

## IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

---

Among the most common beliefs about adolescence is that it is the time when teens form their personal identities. Empirical studies confirm a normative process of change in both the content and structure of one's thoughts about the self. Researchers have used three general approaches to understanding identity development: self-concept, sense of identity and self-esteem.

## SELF-CONCEPT

---

Early in adolescence, cognitive developments result in greater self-awareness, greater awareness of others and their thoughts and judgments, the ability to think about abstract, future possibilities, and the ability to consider multiple possibilities at once. While children define themselves with physical traits, adolescents define themselves based on their values, thoughts and opinions.

Adolescents can now conceptualize multiple “possible selves” they could become and long-term possibilities and consequences of their choices. Exploring these possibilities may result in abrupt changes in self-presentation as the adolescent chooses or rejects qualities and behaviors, trying to guide the actual self toward the ideal self (who the adolescent wishes to be) and away from the feared self (who the adolescent does not want to be). In terms of gender socialization, boys and girls start to gravitate toward traditional roles. For example, girls may take more liberal art type classes while boys are more physical. Boys and girls tend to socialize together, although dating starts to occur. Girls generally look to their mothers or female role models for guidance, while boys tend to identify more with their fathers or male role models.

## SENSE OF IDENTITY

---

Unlike the conflicting aspects of self-concept, identity represents a coherent sense of self stable across circumstances and including past experiences and future goals. Development psychologist Erik Erikson describes adolescence as the period during which individuals ponder the questions: who am I and what can I be? As they make the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents ponder the roles they will play in the adult world. Initially, they are apt to experience some role confusion—mixed ideas and feelings about the specific ways in which they will fit into society—and may experiment with a variety of behaviors and activities. For example, a girl may want to pursue a career that is predominantly male, and if she is stifled by her sense of female identity, she may end up with a lifetime of regret. The same is true of males wishing to pursue a female-dominated career. Erikson proposed that most adolescents eventually achieve a sense of identity regarding who they are and where their lives are headed.

## SELF-ESTEEM

---

The final major aspect of identity formation is self-esteem, which is one's thoughts and feelings about one's self-concept and identity. Contrary to popular belief, there is no empirical evidence for a significant drop in self-esteem over the course of adolescence. "Barometric self-esteem" fluctuates rapidly and can cause severe distress and anxiety, but baseline self-esteem remains highly stable across adolescence. The validity of global self-esteem scales has been questioned, and many suggest that more specific scales might reveal more about the adolescent experience. For girls, they are most likely to enjoy high self-esteem when engaged in supportive relationships with friends, as the most important function of friendship to them is having someone who can provide social and moral support. In contrast, boys are more concerned with establishing and asserting their independence and defining their relation to authority. As such, they are more likely to derive high self-esteem from their ability to successfully influence their friends.

## RELATIONSHIPS

---

### PEERS

---

Peer groups are especially important during adolescence, a period of development characterized by a dramatic increase in time spent with peers and a decrease in adult supervision. Adolescents also associate with friends of the opposite sex much more than in childhood and tend to identify with larger groups of peers based on shared characteristics. Peer groups offer members the opportunity to develop various social skills like empathy, sharing and leadership.

## ROMANCE AND SEXUAL ACTIVITY

---

Romantic relationships tend to increase in prevalence throughout adolescence. The typical duration of relationships increases throughout the teenage years as well. This constant increase in the likelihood of a long-term relationship can be explained by sexual maturation and the development of cognitive skills necessary to maintain a romantic bond, although these skills are not strongly developed until late adolescence. Overall, positive romantic relationships among adolescents can result in long-term benefits. High-quality romantic relationships are associated with higher commitment in early adulthood and are positively associated with self-esteem, self-confidence and social competence.

## HANGING OUT

---

Peer relationships play a significant role in adolescent socialization.

## CHAPTER 20

---

# *Gender Differences in Social Interaction*

### **Gender Differences in Social Interaction**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL INTERACTION**

---

Masculine and feminine individuals generally differ in how they communicate with others.

---

### **KEY POINTS**

---

- Differences between “gender cultures” influence the way that people of different genders communicate. These

differences begin at childhood.

- Traditionally, masculine people and feminine people communicate with people of their own gender in different ways.
- Through communication we learn about what qualities and activities our culture prescribes to our sex.

### TERMS

---

- gender culture The set of behaviors or practices associated with masculinity and femininity.
- gender The socio-cultural phenomenon of the division of people into various categories such as male and female, with each having associated roles, expectations, stereotypes, etc.

### EXAMPLE

---

- The hijras of the Indian subcontinent are a striking example of the way in which the lines between genders can be muddled during the course of social interaction. While often biologically male, hijras tend to identify more closely with women when it comes to their clothing and behavior. However, their expression of femininity is often a caricature of how a woman is traditionally expected to behave, as they typically act in a very lewd and sexually provocative way towards men. This particular public expression of femininity is considered highly inappropriate by mainstream society.

---

Social and cultural norms can significantly influence both the expression of gender identity, and the nature of the interactions between genders.

Differences between “gender cultures” influence the way that people of different genders communicate. These differences begin at childhood. Maltz and Broker’s research showed that the games children play contribute to socializing children into masculine and feminine cultures. For example, girls playing house promotes personal relationships, and playing house does not necessarily have fixed rules or objectives. Boys, however, tend to play more competitive team sports with different goals and strategies. These differences as children cause women to operate from assumptions about communication, and use rules for communication that differ significantly from those endorsed by most men.

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

---

Masculine and feminine cultures and individuals generally differ in how they communicate with others. For example, feminine people tend to self-disclose more often than masculine people, and in more intimate details. Likewise, feminine people tend to communicate more affection, and with greater intimacy and confidence than masculine people. Generally speaking, feminine people communicate more and prioritize communication more than masculine people.

Traditionally, masculine people and feminine people communicate with people of their own gender in different ways. Masculine people form friendships with other masculine people based on common interests, while feminine people build friendships with other feminine people based on mutual support. However, both genders initiate opposite-gender friendships based on the same factors. These factors include proximity, acceptance, effort, communication, common interests, affection and novelty.

Context is very important when determining how we communicate with others. It is important to understand what script it is appropriate to use in each respective relationship. Specifically, understanding how affection is communicated in a given context is extremely important. For example, masculine people expect competition in their friendships. They avoid communicating weakness and vulnerability. They avoid communicating personal and emotional concerns. Masculine people tend to communicate affection by including their friends in activities and exchanging favors. Masculine people tend to communicate with each other shoulder-to-shoulder (e.g., watching sports on a television).

In contrast, feminine people are more likely to communicate weakness and vulnerability. In fact, they may seek out friendships more in these times. For this reason, feminine people often feel closer to their friends than masculine people do. Feminine people tend to value their friends for listening and communicating non-critically, communicating support, communicating feelings of enhanced self-esteem, communicating validation, offering comfort and contributing to personal growth. Feminine people tend to communicate with each other face-to-face (e.g., meeting together to talk over lunch).

## COMMUNICATION AND GENDER CULTURES

---

A communication culture is a group of people with an existing set of norms regarding how they communicate with each other. These cultures can be categorized as masculine or feminine. Gender cultures are primarily created and sustained by interaction with others. Through communication we learn about what qualities and activities our culture prescribes to our sex. While it is commonly believed that our sex is the root source of differences and how we relate and communicate to others, it is actually gender that plays a larger role. Whole cultures can be broken down into masculine and feminine, each differing in how they get along with others through

different styles of communication. Julia T. Wood's studies explain that "communication produces and reproduces cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity. " Masculine and feminine cultures differ dramatically in when, how, and why they use communication.

## COMMUNICATION STYLES

---

Deborah Tannen's studies found these gender differences in communication styles (where men more generally refers to masculine people, and women correspondingly refers to feminine people):

- Men tend to talk more than women in public situations, but women tend to talk more than men at home.
- Women are more inclined to face each other and make eye contact when talking, while men are more likely to look away from each other.
- Men tend to jump from topic to topic, but women tend to talk at length about one topic.
- When listening, women make more noises such as "mm-hmm" and "uh-huh", while men are more likely to listen silently.
- Women are inclined to express agreement and support, while men are more inclined to debate.

## CHAPTER 21

---

# *The Functionalist Perspective*

### **The Functionalist Perspective**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **THE FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE**

---

The functionalist perspective of gender roles suggests that gender roles exist to maximize social efficiency.

---

### *KEY POINTS*

---

- The functionalist perspective sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation and broadly focuses on the social structures that shape society as a whole.

- This theory suggests that gender inequalities exist as an efficient way to create a division of labor, or as a social system in which a particular segment of the population is clearly responsible for certain acts of labor and another segment is clearly responsible for other labor acts.
  - The feminist movement takes the position that functionalism neglects the suppression of women within the family structure.
- 

## TERMS

---

- **Division of labor** A division of labour is the dividing and specializing of cooperative labour into specifically circumscribed tasks and roles.
  - **The Functionalist Perspective** A broad social theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.
  - **functionalist perspective of gender inequality** A theory that suggests that gender inequalities exist as an efficient way to create a division of labor, or a social system in which a particular segment of the population is clearly responsible for certain acts of labor and another segment is clearly responsible for other labor acts.
- 

The functionalist perspective sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This

approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole, and looks at both social structure and social functions. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements, namely: norms, customs, traditions, and institutions. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as “organs” that work toward the proper functioning of the “body” as a whole.

The functionalist perspective of gender inequality was most robustly articulated in the 1940s and 1950s, and largely developed by Talcott Parsons’ model of the nuclear family. This theory suggests that gender inequalities exist as an efficient way to create a division of labor, or as a social system in which particular segments are clearly responsible for certain, respective acts of labor. The division of labor works to maximize resources and efficiency. A structural functionalist view of gender inequality applies the division of labor to view predefined gender roles as complementary: women take care of the home while men provide for the family. Thus gender, like other social institutions, contributes to the stability of society as a whole.

In sociological research, functional prerequisites are the basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, and money) that an individual requires to live above the poverty line. Functional prerequisites may also refer to the factors that allow a society to maintain social order. According to structural functionalists, gender serves to maintain social order by providing and ensuring the stability of such functional prerequisites.

This view has been criticized for reifying, rather than reflecting, gender roles. While gender roles, according to the functionalist perspective, are beneficial in that they contribute to stable social relations, many argue that gender roles are discriminatory and should not be upheld. The feminist movement, which was on the rise at the same time that functionalism began to decline, takes

the position that functionalism neglects the suppression of women within the family structure.

**CHAPTER 22**

---

## *The Conflict Perspective*

**The Conflict Perspective**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

**THE CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE**

---

Conflict theory suggests that men, as the dominant gender, subordinate women in order to maintain power and privilege in society.

---

**KEY POINTS**

---

- Conflict theory asserts that social problems occur when dominant groups mistreat subordinate ones, and thus advocates for a balance of power between genders.
- Frederich Engels compared

the family structure to the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, suggesting that women had less power than men in the household because they were dependent on them for wages.

- Men, like any other group with a power or wealth advantage in Conflict Theory, fought to maintain their control over resources (in this case, political and economic power). Conflict between the two groups caused things like the Women's Suffrage Movement and was responsible for social change.

---

## TERMS

---

- dominant Ruling; governing; prevailing; controlling.
- subordinate To make subservient.
- proletariat the working class or lower class
- dominant group a sociological category that holds the majority of authority and power over other social groups

---

According to conflict theory, society is defined by a struggle for dominance among social groups that compete for scarce resources. In the context of gender, conflict theory argues that gender is best understood as men attempting to maintain power and privilege to the detriment of women. Therefore, men can be seen as the dominant group and women as the subordinate group. While certain gender roles may have been appropriate in a hunter-

gatherer society, conflict theorists argue that the only reason these roles persist is because the dominant group naturally works to maintain their power and status. According to conflict theory, social problems are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups. Therefore, their approach is normative in that it prescribes changes to the power structure, advocating a balance of power between genders.

In most cultures, men have historically held most of the world's resources. Until relatively recently, women in Western cultures could not vote or hold property, making them entirely dependent on men. Men, like any other group with a power or wealth advantage, fought to maintain their control over resources (in this case, political and economic power). Conflict between the two groups caused things like the Women's Suffrage Movement and was responsible for social change.

Friedrich Engels, a German sociologist, studied family structure and gender roles from a Marxist perspective. Engels suggested that the same owner-worker relationship seen in the labor force could also be seen in the household, with women assuming the role of the proletariat. This was due to women's dependence on men for the attainment of wages. Contemporary conflict theorists suggest that when women become wage earners, they gain power in the family structure and create more democratic arrangements in the home, although they may still carry the majority of the domestic burden.

## CHAPTER 23

---

# *Gender Stratification*

### **Gender Stratification**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **GENDER STRATIFICATION**

---

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, gender is produced and reinforced through daily interactions and the use of symbols.

---

### *KEY POINTS*

---

- Scholars of interactionism study how individuals act within society and believe that meaning is produced through interactions.
- According to interactionists, gender stratification exists because people act toward each other on the

basis of the meanings they have for each other, and that these meanings are derived from social interaction.

- According to Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self," an individual's understanding of their gender role is based on how society perceives them. Thus, if society views a man as masculine, he will also perceive himself to be masculine.
- "Doing gender" is the notion that masculinity and femininity are performed gender identities. Gender is something we do or perform, not something we are.

### TERMS

---

- Charles H. Cooley an early twentieth century sociologist who developed the idea of the "looking-glass self"
- masculinity the degree or property of being masculine or manly; manliness
- femininity the sum of all attributes that convey (or are perceived to convey) womanhood

### EXAMPLE

---

- In 1971, a study conducted by Broverman and Broverman sought to reveal the characteristics that mental health workers attributed to males and females. The traits listed for females include adjectives like gentle, emotional, tactful, unambitious, dependent, passive and neat. On the other hand, the list for the men included

adjectives like aggressive, rough, unemotional, blunt, logical, direct, active and sloppy. Notably, when these workers were asked to describe the attributes of a healthy person without a specific gender in mind, the list that was produced was almost identical to the one created for men. This study suggested that there is a tendency to characterize women as being less healthy and less mentally sound than men.

---

## INTERACTIONISM

---

In sociology, interactionism is a theoretical perspective that understands social processes (such as conflict, cooperation, identity formation) as emerging from human interaction. Scholars of this perspective study how individuals act within society, and believe that meaning is produced through the interactions of individuals. According to interactionists, gender stratification exists because people act toward each other on the basis of the meanings they have for one another. Interactionists believe that these meanings are derived through social interaction, and that these meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretive process that people use to make sense of, and handle, the objects that constitute their social worlds.

## GOFFMAN AND CONTROL

---

Social interaction is a face-to-face process that consists of actions, reactions, and mutual adaptation between two or more individuals. The goal of social interaction is to communicate with others. Social interaction includes all language, including body language and mannerisms. Erving Goffman, one of the forefathers of this

theoretical perspective, emphasized the importance of *control* in social interactions. According to Goffman, during an interaction, individuals will attempt to control the behavior of the other participants, in order to attain needed information, and in order to control the perception of one's own image. If the interaction is in danger of ending before an individual wants it to, it can be conserved through several steps. One conversational partner can conform to the expectations of the other, he or she can ignore certain incidents, or he or she can solve apparent problems.

## SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

---

Symbolic interactionism aims to understand human behavior by analyzing the critical role of symbols in human interaction. This is certainly relevant to the discussion of masculinity and femininity, because the characteristics and practices of both are socially constructed, reproduced, and reinforced through daily interactions. Imagine, for example, that you walk into a bank, hoping to get a small loan for school, a home, or a small business venture. If you meet with a male loan officer, you might state your case logically, listing all of the hard numbers that make you a qualified applicant for the loan. This type of approach would appeal to the analytical characteristics typically associated with masculinity. If you meet with a female loan officer, on the other hand, you might make an emotional appeal, by stating your positive social intentions. This type of approach would appeal to the sensitive and relational characteristics typically associated with femininity.

## GENDER AS PERFORMANCE

---

The meanings attached to symbols are socially created and fluid, instead of natural and static. Because of this, we act and react to symbols based on their current assigned meanings. Both

masculinity and femininity are performed gender identities, in the sense that gender is something we do or perform, not something we are . In response to this phenomena, the sociologist Charles H. Cooley's developed the theory of the "looking-glass self" (1902). In this theory, Cooley argued that an individual's perception of himself or herself is based primarily how society views him or her. In the context of gender, if society perceives a man as masculine, that man will consider himself as masculine. Thus, when people perform tasks or possess characteristics based on the gender role assigned to them, they are said to be *doing gender* (rather than "being" gender), a notion first coined by West and Zimmerman (1987). West & Zimmerman emphasized that gender is maintained through accountability. Men and women are expected to perform their gender to the point that it is naturalized, and thus, their status depends on their performance.

**PART III**

---

**INTERSECTIONALIT  
Y**



## CHAPTER 24

---

# *Intersectionality - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes*

## **Intersectionality - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes**

DEBORAH HOLT, BS, MA

By the end of this learning unit, student will be able to:

- Discuss and analyze intersectionality theory and the complexity of group membership and identities, and the matrix of oppression.
- Examine the extent to which gender affects access to opportunity, power, and resources.

## CHAPTER 25

---

# *Intersectionality - The Feminist Perspective*

### **Intersectionality - The Feminist Perspective**

BOUNDLESS, BOUNDLESS SOCIOLOGY, [HTTP://OER2GO.ORG/MODS/EN-BOUNDLESS/WWW.BOUNDLESS.COM/SOCIOLOGY/TEXTBOOKS/BOUNDLESS-SOCIOLOGY-TEXTBOOK/INDEX.HTML](http://oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/index.html)

## **THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

---

Feminist theory analyzes gender stratification through the intersection of gender, race, and class.

---

### *KEY POINTS*

---

- Gender stratification occurs when gender differences give men greater privilege and power over women, transgender and gender-non-conforming people.

- Feminist theory uses the conflict approach to examine the reinforcement of gender roles and inequalities, highlighting the role of patriarchy in maintaining the oppression of women.
- Feminism focuses on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on the assertion of male supremacy.
- Intersectionality suggests that various forms of oppression– such as racism, classism, and sexism– are interrelated to form a system of oppression in which various forms of discrimination intersect. The theory was first highlighted by Kimberlé Krenshaw.
- Intersectionality suggests that various biological, social, and cultural categories– including gender, race, class, and ethnicity– interact and contribute towards systematic social inequality. Therefore, various forms of oppression do not act independently but are interrelated.
- Mary Ann Weathers drew attention to the ways in which white women face a different form of discrimination than working class women of color, who additionally must fight racism and class oppression.

## TERMS

---

- patriarchy The dominance of men in social or cultural systems.
- Intersectionality The idea that various biological, social,

and cultural categories– including gender, race, class, and ethnicity– interact and contribute towards systematic social inequality.

- conflict theory A social science perspective that holds that stratification is dysfunctional and harmful in society, with inequality perpetuated because it benefits the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor.

### EXAMPLE

---

- Mary Ann Weathers demonstrates intersectionality in action in “An Argument for Black Women’s Liberation as a Revolutionary Force.” In this publication, Weathers reveals that in the twentieth century, working-class women of color embodied the notion of intersectionality. The first and second waves of the feminist movement were primarily driven by white women, who did not adequately represent the feminist movement as a whole. It was important to recognize that white women faced a different form of discrimination than working class women of color, who not only had to deal with sexism, but also fight against racism and class oppression.

---

In sociology, social stratification occurs when differences lead to greater status, power, or privilege for some groups over others. Simply put, it is a system by which society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy. Members of society are socially stratified on many levels, including socio-economic status, race, class, ethnicity, religion, ability status, and gender. Gender stratification

occurs when gender differences give men greater privilege and power over women, transgender, and gender-non-conforming people.

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality, and examines women's social roles, experiences, and interests. While generally providing a critique of social relations, much of feminist theory also focuses on analyzing gender inequality and the promotion of women's interests .

### “WOMEN! THE SAME RIGHTS, THE SAME DUTIES. “

---

This 1919 German social democratic election poster advocates for the rights of women. However, did white women face the same challenges that women of other races and ethnic groups did?

Feminist theory uses the conflict approach to examine the reinforcement of gender roles and inequalities. Conflict theory posits that stratification is dysfunctional and harmful in society, with inequality perpetuated because it benefits the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor. Radical feminism, in particular, evaluates the role of the patriarchy in perpetuating male dominance. In patriarchal societies, the male's perspective and contributions are considered more valuable, resulting in the silencing and marginalization of the woman. Feminism focuses on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on the assertion of male supremacy.

The feminist perspective of gender stratification more recently takes into account intersectionality, a feminist sociological theory first highlighted by feminist-sociologist Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality suggests that various biological, social and cultural categories, including gender, race, class and ethnicity, interact and contribute towards systematic social inequality. Therefore, various

forms of oppression, such as racism or sexism, do not act independently of one another; instead these forms of oppression are interrelated, forming a system of oppression that reflects the “intersection” of multiple forms of discrimination. In light of this theory, the oppression and marginalization of women is thus shaped not only by gender, but by other factors such as race and class.

Mary Ann Weathers demonstrates intersectionality in action in *“An Argument for Black Women’s Liberation as a Revolutionary Force.”* In this publication, Weathers reveals that in the twentieth century, working-class women of color embodied the notion of intersectionality. The first and second waves of the feminist movement were primarily driven by white women, who did not adequately represent the feminist movement as a whole. It was—and continues to be—important to recognize that white women faced a different form of discrimination than working class women of color, who not only had to deal with sexism, but also fought against racism and class oppression.

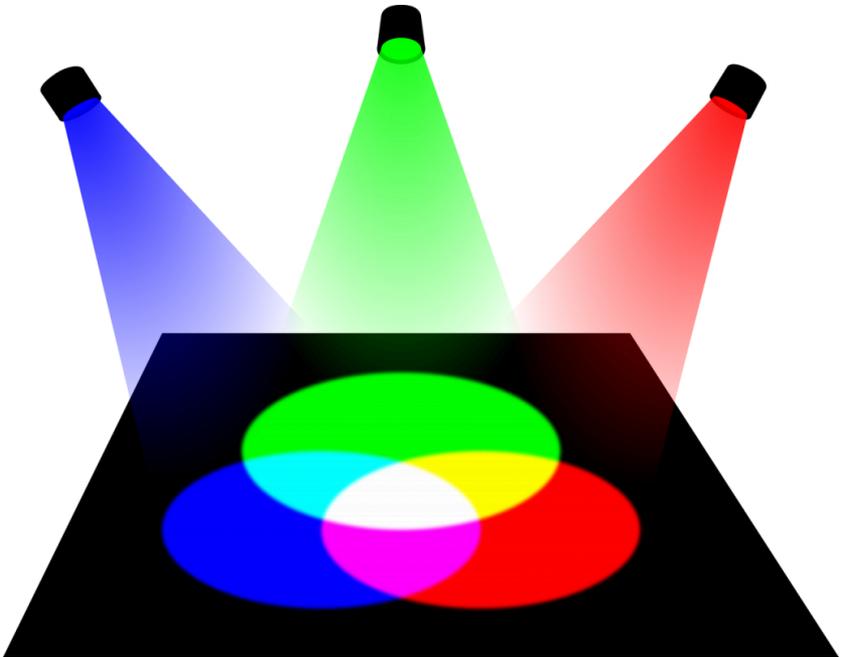
**CHAPTER 26**

---

# *Intersectionality*

**Intersectionality**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)



*This work is in the Public Domain, CC0*

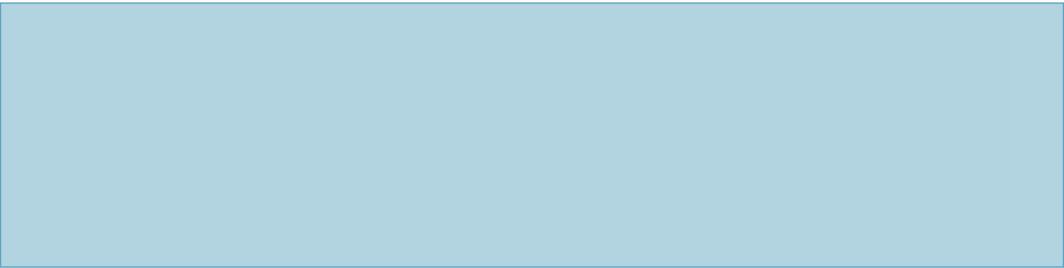
Understanding intersectionality requires a particular way of thinking. It is different than how many people imagine identities operate. An intersectional analysis of identity is distinct from single-determinant identity models and additive models of identity. A **single determinant model of identity** presumes that one aspect of identity, say, gender, dictates one's access to or disenfranchisement from power. An example of this idea is the concept of "global sisterhood," or the idea that all women across the globe share some basic common political interests, concerns, and needs (Morgan 1996). If women in different locations did share common interests, it would make sense for them to unite on the basis of gender to fight for social changes on a global scale. Unfortunately, if the analysis of social problems stops at gender, what is missed is an attention to how various cultural contexts shaped by race, religion, and access to resources may actually place some women's needs at cross-purposes to other women's needs. Therefore, this approach obscures the fact that women in different social and geographic locations face different problems. Although many white, middle-class women activists of the mid-20th century US fought for freedom to work and legal parity with men, this was not the major problem for women of color or working-class white women who had already been actively participating in the US labor market as domestic workers, factory workers, and slave laborers since early US colonial settlement. Campaigns for women's equal legal rights and access to the labor market at the international level are shaped by the experience and concerns of white American women, while women of the global south, in particular, may have more pressing concerns: access to clean water, access to adequate health care, and safety from the physical and psychological harms of living in tyrannical, war-torn, or economically impoverished nations.



*This work is in the Public Domain,  
CC0*

In contrast to the single-determinant identity model, the **additive model of identity** simply adds together privileged and disadvantaged identities for a slightly more complex picture. For instance, a Black man may experience some advantages based on his gender, but has limited access to power based on his race. This kind of analysis is exemplified in how race and gender wage gaps are portrayed in statistical studies and popular news reports. Below, you can see a median wage gap table from the Institute for Women's Policy Research compiled in 2009. In reading the table, it can be seen that the gender wage gap is such that in 2009, overall, women earned 77% of what men did in the US. The table breaks down the information further to show that earnings varied not only by gender but by race as well. Thus, Hispanic or Latino women earned only 52.9% of what white men did while white women made 75%. This is certainly more descriptive than a single

gender wage gap figure or a single race wage gap figure. The table is useful at pointing to potential structural explanations that may make earnings differ between groups. For instance, looking at the chart, you may immediately wonder why these gaps exist; is it a general difference of education levels, occupations, regions of residence or skill levels between groups, or is it something else, such as discrimination in hiring and promotion? What it is not useful for is predicting people's incomes by plugging in their gender plus their race, even though it may be our instinct to do so. Individual experiences differ vastly and for a variety of reasons; there are outliers in every group. Most importantly, even if this chart helps in understanding structural reasons why incomes differ, it doesn't provide all the answers.



| Racial/Ethnic Background* | Men (\$) | Women (\$) | Women's Earnings as % of White Male Earnings |
|---------------------------|----------|------------|--|
| All Racial/Ethnic Groups  | 51,212   | 40,742     | -  |
| White                     | 57,204   | 43,063     | 75.3%  |
| Black                     | 41,094   | 36,212     | 63.3%  |
| Asian American            | 61,672   | 48,313     | 84.5%  |
| Hispanic or Latino        | 35,673   | 31,109     | 54.4%  |

\*White alone, not Hispanic; Black alone or in combination (may include Hispanic); Asian American alone or in combination (may include Hispanic); and Hispanic/Latina/o (may be of any race).

Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research. Compilation of U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2016. "Historical Income Tables: Table P-38. Full-Time, Year Round Workers by Median Earnings and Sex: 1987 to 2015. <<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/incomepoverty/historical-income-people.html>>

The additive model does not take into account how our shared cultural ideas of gender are racialized and our ideas of race are gendered and that these ideas structure access to resources and power—material, political, interpersonal. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2005) has developed a strong intersectional framework through her discussion of race, gender, and sexuality in her historical analysis of representations of Black sexuality in the US. Hill Collins shows how contemporary white American culture exoticizes Black men and women and she points to a history of enslavement and treatment as chattel as the origin and motivator for the use of these images. In order to justify slavery, African-Americans were thought of and treated as less than human. Sexual

reproduction was often forced among slaves for the financial benefit of plantation owners, but owners reframed this coercion and rape as evidence of the “natural” and uncontrollable sexuality of people from the African continent. Images of Black men and women were not completely the same, as Black men were constructed as hypersexual “bucks” with little interest in continued relationships whereas Black women were framed as hypersexual “Jezebels” that became the “matriarchs” of their families. Again, it is important to note how the context, where enslaved families were often forcefully dismantled, is often left unacknowledged and contemporary racialized constructions are assumed and framed as individual choices or traits. It is shockingly easy to see how these images are still present in contemporary media, culture, and politics, for instance, in discussions of American welfare programs. This analysis reveals how race, gender, and sexuality intersect. We cannot simply pull these identities apart because they are interconnected and mutually enforcing.

Although the framework of intersectional has contributed important insights to feminist analyses, there are problems. Intersectionality refers to the mutually co-constitutive nature of multiple aspects of identity, yet in practice this term is typically used to signify the specific difference of “women of color,” which effectively produces women of color (and in particular, Black women) as Other and again centers white women (Puar 2012). In addition, the framework of intersectionality was created in the context of the United States; therefore, the use of the framework reproduces the United States as the dominant site of feminist inquiry and women’s studies’ Euro-American bias (Puar 2012). Another failing of intersectionality is its premise of fixed categories of identity, where descriptors like race, gender, class, and sexuality are assumed to be stable. In contrast, the notion of **assemblage** considers categories events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply attributes (Puar 2012). Assemblage refers to a collage or collection of things, or the act of assembling.

An assemblage perspective emphasizes how relations, patterns, and connections between concepts give concepts meaning (Puar 2012). Although assemblage has been framed against intersectionality, identity categories' mutual co-constitution is accounted for in both intersectionality and assemblage.

"Gender" is too often used simply and erroneously to mean "white women," while "race" too often connotes "Black men." An intersectional perspective examines how identities are related to each other in our own experiences and how the social structures of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability intersect for everyone. As opposed to single-determinant and additive models of identity, an intersectional approach develops a more sophisticated understanding of the world and how individuals in differently situated social groups experience differential access to both material and symbolic resources.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

## CHAPTER 27

---

# *Binary Systems*

### **Binary Systems**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)

Black and white. Masculine and feminine. Rich and poor. Straight and gay. Able-bodied and disabled. **Binaries** are social constructs composed of two parts that are framed as absolute and unchanging opposites. **Binary systems** reflect the integration of these oppositional ideas into our culture. This results in an exaggeration of differences between social groups until they seem to have nothing in common. An example of this is the phrase “men are from Mars, women are from Venus.” Ideas of men and women being complete opposites invite simplistic comparisons that rely on stereotypes: men are practical, women are emotional; men are strong, women are weak; men lead, women support. Binary notions mask the complicated realities and variety in the realm of social identity. They also erase the existence of individuals, such as multiracial or mixed-race people and people with non-binary gender identities, who may identify with neither of the assumed categories or with multiple categories. We know very well that men have emotions and that women have physical strength, but a

binary perspective of gender prefigures men and women to have nothing in common. They are defined against each other; men are defined, in part, as “not women” and women as “not men.” Thus, our understandings of men are influenced by our understandings of women. Rather than seeing aspects of identity like race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality as containing only two dichotomous, opposing categories, conceptualizing multiple various identities allows us to examine how men and women, Black and white, etc., may not be so completely different after all, and how varied and complex identities and lives can be.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

## CHAPTER 28

---

# *Masculinities*

### **Masculinities**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)

Another concept that troubles the gender binary is the idea of **multiple masculinities** (Connell, 2005). Connell suggests that there is more than one kind of masculinity and what is considered “masculine” differs by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. For example, being knowledgeable about computers might be understood as masculine because it can help a person accumulate income and wealth, and we consider wealth to be masculine. However, computer knowledge only translates into “masculinity” for certain men. While an Asian-American, middle-class man might get a boost in “masculinity points” (as it were) for his high-paying job with computers, the same might not be true for a working-class white man whose white-collar desk job may be seen as a weakness to his masculinity by other working-class men. Expectations for masculinity differ by age; what it means to be a man at 19 is very different than what it means to be a man at 70. Therefore, masculinity intersects with other identities and expectations change accordingly.

Judith (Jack) Halberstam used the concept of **female masculinity** to describe the ways female-assigned people may accomplish masculinity (2005). Halberstam defines masculinity as the connection between maleness and power, which female-assigned people access through drag-king performances, butch identity (where female-assigned people appear and act masculine and may or may not identify as women), or trans identity. Separating masculinity from male-assigned bodies illustrates how performative it is, such that masculinity is accomplished in interactions and not ordained by nature.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)



**PART IV**

---

**INFLUENCE OF  
WOMEN**



**CHAPTER 29**

---

# *Influence of Women - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes*

## **Influence of Women - Student Specific Content Learning Outcomes**

DEBORAH HOLT, BS, MA

By the end of this learning unit, student will be able to:

- Examine the impact of women within the cultural and historical contexts of social groups throughout the world by focusing on interdisciplinary topics involving interrelationships among Women in the Humanities and related fields.

## CHAPTER 30

---

# *Feminist Movements*

### **Feminist Movements**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)

“History is also everybody talking at once, multiple rhythms being played simultaneously. The events and people we write about did not occur in isolation but in dialogue with a myriad of other people and events. In fact, at any given moment millions of people are all talking at once. As historians we try to isolate one conversation and to explore it, but the trick is then how to put that conversation in a context which makes evident its dialogue with so many others—how to make this one lyric stand alone and at the same time be in connection with all the other lyrics being sung.”

—Elsa Barkley Brown, “What has happened here,” pp. 297-298.

Feminist historian Elsa Barkley Brown reminds us that social movements and identities are not separate from each other, as we often imagine they are in contemporary society. She argues that we must have a relational understanding of social movements and identities within and between social movements—an understanding of the ways in which privilege and oppression are linked and how the stories of people of color and feminists fighting

for justice have been historically linked through overlapping and sometimes conflicting social movements. In this chapter, we use a relational lens to discuss and make sense of feminist movements, beginning in the 19th Century up to the present time. Although we use the terms “first wave,” “second wave,” and “third wave,” characterizing feminist resistance in these “waves” is problematic, as it figures distinct “waves” of activism as prioritizing distinct issues in each time period, obscuring histories of feminist organizing in locations and around issues not discussed in the dominant “waves” narratives. Indeed, these “waves” are not mutually exclusive or totally separate from each other. In fact, they inform each other, not only in the way that contemporary feminist work has in many ways been made possible by earlier feminist activism, but also in the way that contemporary feminist activism informs the way we think of past feminist activism and feminisms. Nonetheless, understanding that the “wave” language has historical meaning, we use it throughout this section. Relatedly, although a focus on prominent leaders and events can obscure the many people and actions involved in everyday resistance and community organizing, we focus on the most well known figures, political events, and social movements, understanding that doing so advances one particular lens of history.

Additionally, feminist movements have generated, made possible, and nurtured feminist theories and feminist academic knowledge. In this way, feminist movements are fantastic examples of **praxis**—that is, they use critical reflection about the world to change it. It is because of various social movements—feminist activism, workers’ activism, and civil rights activism throughout the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries—that “feminist history” is a viable field of study today. Feminist history is part of a larger historical project that draws on the experiences of traditionally ignored and disempowered groups (e.g., factory workers, immigrants, people of color, lesbians) to re-think and challenge the histories that have been traditionally written from the experiences and points of view

of the powerful (e.g., colonizers, representatives of the state, the wealthy)—the histories we typically learn in high school textbooks. \*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

**CHAPTER 31**

---

# *19th Century Feminist Movements*

**19th Century Feminist Movements**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)

What has come to be called the first wave of the feminist movement began in the mid 19th century and lasted until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which gave women the right to vote. White middle-class first wave feminists in the 19th century to early 20th century, such as suffragist leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, primarily focused on women's suffrage (the right to vote), striking down coverture laws, and gaining access to education and employment. These goals are famously enshrined in the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, which is the resulting document of the first women's rights convention in the United States in 1848.



*[“Votes for Women” sellers, 1908.](#) [The Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science is in the Public Domain](#)*

Demanding women’s enfranchisement, the abolition of coverture, and access to employment and education were quite radical demands at the time. These demands confronted the ideology of the **cult of true womanhood**, summarized in four key tenets—piety, purity, submission and domesticity—which held that white women were rightfully and naturally located in the private sphere of the household and not fit for public, political participation or labor in the waged economy. However, this emphasis on confronting the ideology of the cult of true womanhood was shaped by the white middle-class standpoint of the leaders of the movement. As we discussed in Chapter 3, the cult of true womanhood was an ideology of white womanhood that systematically denied black and working-class women access to the

category of “women,” because working-class and black women, by necessity, had to labor outside of the home.

The white middle-class leadership of the first wave movement shaped the priorities of the movement, often excluding the concerns and participation of working-class women and women of color. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA) in order to break from other suffragists who supported the passage of the 15th Amendment, which would give African American men the right to vote before women. Stanton and Anthony privileged white women’s rights instead of creating solidarities across race and class groups. Accordingly, they saw women’s suffrage as the central goal of the women’s rights movement. For example, in the first issue of her newspaper, *The Revolution*, Susan B. Anthony wrote, “We shall show that the ballot will secure for woman equal place and equal wages in the world of work; that it will open to her the schools, colleges, professions, and all the opportunities and advantages of life; that in her hand it will be a moral power to stay the tide of crime and misery on every side” (cited by Davis 1981: 73). Meanwhile, working-class women and women of color *knew* that mere access to voting did not overturn class and race inequalities. As feminist activist and scholar Angela Davis (1981) writes, working-class women “...were seldom moved by the suffragists’ promise that the vote would permit them to become equal to their men—their exploited, suffering men” (Davis 1981: 74-5). Furthermore, the largest suffrage organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)—a descendent of the National Women Suffrage Association—barred the participation of Black women suffragists in its organization.

Although the first wave movement was largely defined and led by middle class white women, there was significant overlap between it and the **abolitionist movement**—which sought to end slavery—and the racial justice movement following the end of the Civil War. Historian Nancy Cott (2000) argues that, in some ways,

both movements were largely about having self-ownership and control over one's body. For slaves, that meant the freedom from lifelong, unpaid, forced labor, as well as freedom from the sexual assault that many enslaved Black women suffered from their masters. For married white women, it meant recognition as people in the face of the law and the ability to refuse their husbands' sexual advances. White middle-class abolitionists often made analogies between slavery and marriage, as abolitionist Antoinette Brown wrote in 1853 that, "The wife owes service and labor to her husband as much and as absolutely as the slave does to his master" (Brown, cited. in Cott 2000: 64). This analogy between marriage and slavery had historical resonance at the time, but it problematically conflated the unique experience of the racialized oppression of slavery that African American women faced with a very different type of oppression that white women faced under coverture. This illustrates quite well Angela Davis' (1983) argument that while white women abolitionists and feminists of the time made important contributions to anti-slavery campaigns, they often failed to understand the uniqueness and severity of slave women's lives and the complex system of chattel slavery.

Black activists, writers, newspaper publishers, and academics moved between the racial justice and feminist movements, arguing for inclusion in the first wave feminist movement and condemning slavery and **Jim Crow laws** that maintained racial segregation. Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, which has been attributed to the Akron Women's Convention in 1851, captured this contentious linkage between the first wave women's movement and the abolitionist movement well. In her speech, she critiqued the exclusion of black women from the women's movement while simultaneously condemning the injustices of slavery:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-

puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me!....I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Feminist historian Nell Painter (1996) has questioned the validity of this representation of the speech, arguing that white suffragists dramatically changed its content and title. This illustrates that certain social actors with power can construct the story and possibly misrepresent actors with less power and social movements.



*"Ida B. Wells-Barnett" by Mary Garrity, restored by Adam Cuerden, Google Cultural Institute is in the Public Domain, CCO*

Despite their marginalization, Black women emerged as passionate and powerful leaders. Ida B. Wells, a particularly influential activist who participated in the movement for women's suffrage, was a founding member of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a journalist, and the author of numerous pamphlets and articles exposing the violent lynching of thousands of African Americans in the Reconstruction period (the period following the Civil War). Wells argued that lynching in the Reconstruction Period was a systematic attempt to maintain racial inequality, despite the passage of the 14th Amendment in 1868 (which held that African Americans were citizens and could not be discriminated against based on their race) (Wells 1893). Additionally, thousands of African American women were members of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, which was pro-suffrage, but did not receive recognition from the predominantly middle-class, white National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

The passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 provided a test for the argument that the granting of women's right to vote would give them unfettered access to the institutions they had been denied from, as well as equality with men. Quite plainly, this argument was proven wrong, as had been the case with the passage of the 18th Amendment followed by a period of backlash. The formal legal endorsement of the doctrine of "separate but equal" with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, the complex of Jim Crow laws in states across the country, and the unchecked violence of the Ku Klux Klan, prevented Black women and men from access to voting, education, employment, and public facilities. While equal rights existed in the abstract realm of the law under the 18th and 19th amendments, the on-the-ground reality of continued racial and gender inequality was quite different.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

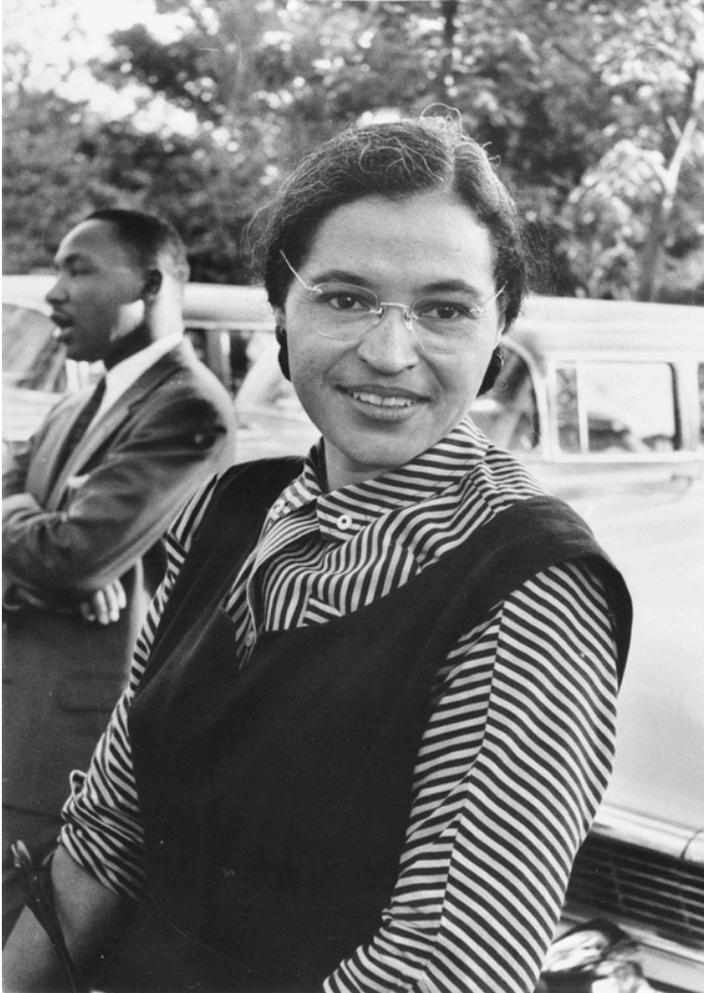
**CHAPTER 32**

---

# *Early to Late 20th Century Feminist Movements*

**Early to Late 20th Century Feminist Movements**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)



*["Photograph of Rosa Parks with Dr. Martin Luther King jr. \(ca. 1955\)" by National Archives and Records Administration Records of the U.S. Information Agency Record Group 306 is in the Public Domain, CC0](#)*

Additionally, the sit-in movement was sparked by the Greensboro sit-ins, when four African American students in Greensboro, North Carolina, sat at and refused to leave a segregated lunch counter at a Woolworth's store in February of 1960. The number of students

participating in the sit-ins increased as the days and weeks went on, and the sit-ins began to receive national media attention. Networks of student activists began sharing the successes of the tactic of the nonviolent sit-in, and began doing sit-ins in their own cities and towns around the country throughout the early 1960s.



*["Ella Baker" by The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights is licensed under CC BY 3.0](#)*

Importantly, the sit-in movement led to the formation of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), initiated by Ella Baker shortly after the first sit-in strikes in Greensboro. The student activists of SNCC took part in the Freedom Rides of 1961, with African American and white men and women participants, and sought to challenge the Jim Crow laws of the south, which the Interstate Commerce Commission had ruled to be unconstitutional. The freedom riders experienced brutal mob violence in Birmingham and were jailed, but the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and SNCC kept sending riders to fill the jails of Birmingham. SNCC also participated in Freedom Summer in 1964, which was a campaign that brought mostly white students from the

north down to the south to support the work of Black southern civil rights activists for voting rights for African Americans. Once again, Freedom Summer activists faced mob violence, but succeeded in bringing national attention to southern states' foot-dragging in terms of allowing African Americans the legal rights they had won through activism and grassroots organizing.



*["Freedom Riders attacked"](#) by Unknown, [The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities](#) is in the [Public Domain](#)*

SNCC's non-hierarchical structure gave women chances to participate in the civil rights movement in ways previously blocked to them. However, the deeply embedded sexism of the surrounding culture still seeped into civil rights organizations, including SNCC. Although women played pivotal roles as organizers and activists throughout the civil rights movement, men occupied the majority of formal leadership roles in the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), the NAACP, and CORE. Working with

SNCC, Black women activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Diane Nash became noted activists and leaders within the civil rights movement in the early 1960s. Despite this, women within SNCC were often expected to do “women’s work” (i.e., housework and secretarial work). White women SNCC activists Casey Hayden and Mary King critiqued this reproduction of gendered roles within the movement and called for dialogue about sexism within the civil rights movement in a memo that circulated through SNCC in 1965, titled “Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo.” The memo became an influential document for the birth of **the second wave feminist movement**, a movement focused generally on fighting patriarchal structures of power, and specifically on combating occupational sex segregation in employment and fighting for reproductive rights for women. However, this was not the only source of second wave feminism, and white women were not the only women spearheading feminist movements. As historian Becky Thompson (2002) argues, in the mid and late 1960s, Latina women, African American women, and Asian American women were developing multiracial feminist organizations that would become important players within the U.S. second wave feminist movement.

In many ways, the second wave feminist movement was influenced and facilitated by the activist tools provided by the civil rights movement. Drawing on the stories of women who participated in the civil rights movement, historians Ellen Debois and Lynn Dumenil (2005) argue that women’s participation in the civil rights movement allowed them to challenge gender norms that held that women belonged in the private sphere, and not in politics or activism. Not only did many women who were involved in the civil rights movement become activists in the second wave feminist movement, they also employed tactics that the civil rights movement had used, including marches and non-violent direct action. Additionally, the Civil Rights Act of 1964—a major legal victory for the civil rights movement—not only prohibited employment discrimination based on race, but Title VII of the Act

also prohibited sex discrimination. When the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)—the federal agency created to enforce Title VII—largely ignored women’s complaints of employment discrimination, 15 women and one man organized to form the National Organization of Women (NOW), which was modeled after the NAACP. NOW focused its attention and organizing on passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), fighting sex discrimination in education, and defending *Roe v. Wade*—the Supreme Court decision of 1973 that struck down state laws that prohibited abortion within the first three months of pregnancy.



*"bell hooks"* by Cmongirl is in the [Public Domain, CCO](#)

Although the second wave feminist movement challenged gendered inequalities and brought women’s issues to the forefront of national politics in the late 1960s and 1970s, the movement also reproduced race and sex inequalities. Black women writers

and activists such as Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins developed **Black feminist thought** as a critique of the ways in which second wave feminists often ignored racism and class oppression and how they uniquely impact women and men of color and working-class people. One of the first formal Black feminist organizations was the Combahee River Collective, formed in 1974. Black feminist bell hooks (1984) argued that feminism cannot just be a fight to make women equal with men, because such a fight does not acknowledge that all men are not equal in a capitalist, racist, and homophobic society. Thus, hooks and other Black feminists argued that sexism cannot be separated from racism, classism and homophobia, and that these systems of domination overlap and reinforce each other. Therefore, she argued, you cannot fight sexism without fighting racism, classism, and homophobia. Importantly, black feminism argues that an intersectional perspective that makes visible and critiques multiple sources of oppression and inequality also inspires coalitional activism that brings people together across race, class, gender, and sexual identity lines.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)

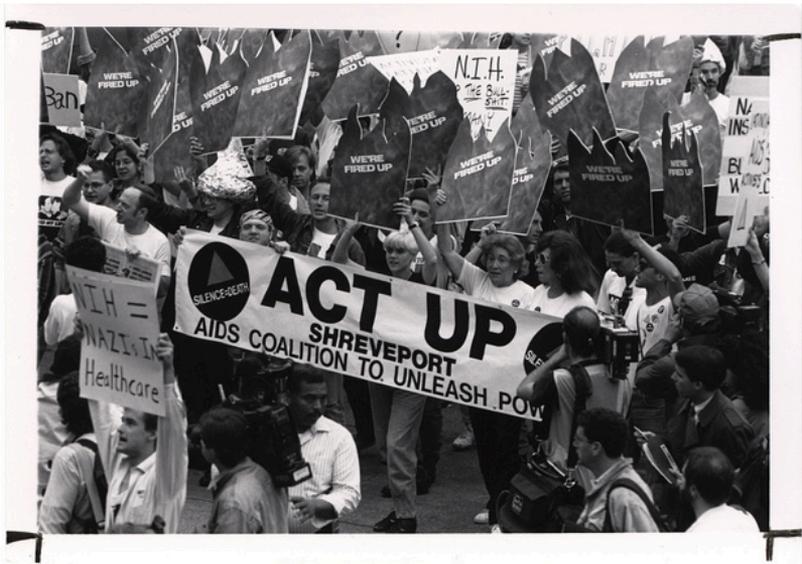
**CHAPTER 33**

---

## *Third Wave and Queer Feminist Movements*

### **Third Wave and Queer Feminist Movements**

MILIANN KANG, DONOVAN LESSARD, AND LAURA HESTON,  
INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES,  
[HTTP://OPENBOOKS.LIBRARY.UMASS.EDU/INTROWGSS/](http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/)



*The ACT UP demonstrations at NIH included various groups from different parts of the United States. This photograph shows the Shreveport, Louisiana ACT UP group at the NIH. "ACT UP Demonstration at NIH" by NIH History Office is in the [Public Domain, CCO](#)*

In the 1980s and 1990s, third wave feminists took up activism in a number of forms. Beginning in the mid 1980s, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) began organizing to press an unwilling US government and medical establishment to develop affordable drugs for people with HIV/AIDS. In the latter part of the 1980s, a more radical subset of individuals began to articulate a **queer** politics, explicitly reclaiming a derogatory term often used against gay men and lesbians, and distancing themselves from the gay and lesbian rights movement, which they felt mainly reflected the interests of white, middle-class gay men and lesbians. As discussed at the beginning of this text, queer also described anti-categorical sexualities. The queer turn sought to develop more radical political perspectives and more inclusive sexual cultures and communities, which aimed to welcome and support transgender and gender non-conforming people and people of color. This was motivated by an intersectional critique of the existing hierarchies within sexual liberation movements, which marginalized individuals within already sexually marginalized groups. In this vein, Lisa Duggan (2002) coined the term **homonormativity**, which describes the normalization and depoliticization of gay men and lesbians through their assimilation into capitalist economic systems and domesticity—individuals who were previously constructed as “other.” These individuals thus gained entrance into social life at the expense and continued marginalization of queers who were non-white, disabled, trans, single or non-monogamous, middle-class, or non-western. Critiques of homonormativity were also critiques of gay identity politics, which left out concerns of many gay individuals who were marginalized within gay groups. Akin to homonormativity, Jasbir Puar coined the term **homonationalism**, which describes the white nationalism taken up by queers, which

sustains racist and xenophobic discourses by constructing immigrants, especially Muslims, as homophobic (Puar 2007). **Identity politics** refers to organizing politically around the experiences and needs of people who share a particular identity. The move from political association with others who share a particular identity to political association with those who have differing identities, but share similar, but differing experiences of oppression (coalitional politics), can be said to be a defining characteristic of the third wave.

Another defining characteristic of the third wave is the development of new tactics to politicize feminist issues and demands. For instance, ACT UP began to use powerful street theater that brought the death and suffering of people with HIV/AIDS to the streets and to the politicians and pharmaceutical companies that did not seem to care that thousands and thousands of people were dying. They staged die-ins, inflated massive condoms, and occupied politicians' and pharmaceutical executives' offices. Their confrontational tactics would be emulated and picked up by anti-globalization activists and the radical Left throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Queer Nation was formed in 1990 by ACT UP activists, and used the tactics developed by ACT UP in order to challenge homophobic violence and heterosexism in mainstream US society.



*A mass “die-in” on the lawn of Bldg. 1 closed the demonstration as ranks of uniformed officers, some on horseback, protected NIH headquarters during the “Storm the NIH” demonstration on May 21, 1990. [“ACT UP Demonstration on the lawn of Building 1”](#) by NIH History Office is in the Public Domain, CC0*

Around the same time as ACT UP was beginning to organize in the mid-1980s, **sex-positive feminism** came into currency among feminist activists and theorists. Amidst what is known now as the “Feminist Sex Wars” of the 1980s, sex-positive feminists argued that sexual liberation, within a sex-positive culture that values consent between partners, would liberate not only women, but also men. Drawing from a social constructionist perspective, sex-positive feminists such as cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1984) argued that no sexual act has an inherent meaning, and that not all sex, or all representations of sex, were inherently degrading to women. In fact, they argued, sexual politics and sexual liberation are key sites of struggle for white women, women of color, gay men, lesbians, queers, and transgender people—groups of people who have historically been stigmatized for their sexual identities or sexual practices. Therefore, a key aspect of queer and feminist subcultures is to create sex-positive spaces and communities that not only valorize sexualities that are often stigmatized in the broader culture, but also place sexual consent at the center of sex-positive spaces and communities. Part of this project of creating sex-positive, feminist and queer spaces is creating media

messaging that attempts to both consolidate feminist communities and create knowledge from and for oppressed groups.

In a media-savvy generation, it is not surprising that cultural production is a main avenue of activism taken by contemporary activists. Although some commentators have deemed the third wave to be “post-feminist” or “not feminist” because it often does not utilize the activist forms (e.g., marches, vigils, and policy change) of the second wave movement (Sommers, 1994), the creation of alternative forms of culture in the face of a massive corporate media industry can be understood as quite political. For example, the Riot Grrrl movement, based in the Pacific Northwest of the US in the early 1990s, consisted of do-it-yourself bands predominantly composed of women, the creation of independent record labels, feminist ‘zines, and art. Their lyrics often addressed gendered sexual violence, sexual liberationism, heteronormativity, gender normativity, police brutality, and war. Feminist news websites and magazines have also become important sources of feminist analysis on current events and issues. Magazines such as *Bitch* and *Ms.*, as well as online blog collectives such as *Feministing* and the *Feminist Wire* function as alternative sources of feminist knowledge production. If we consider the creation of lives on our own terms and the struggle for autonomy as fundamental feminist acts of resistance, then creating alternative culture on our own terms should be considered a feminist act of resistance as well.

As we have mentioned earlier, feminist activism and theorizing by people outside the US context has broadened the feminist frameworks for analysis and action. In a world characterized by global capitalism, transnational immigration, and a history of colonialism that has still has effects today, **transnational feminism** is a body of theory and activism that highlights the connections between sexism, racism, classism, and imperialism. In “Under Western Eyes,” an article by transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), Mohanty critiques the way in which much feminist activism and theory has been created from

a white, North American standpoint that has often exoticized “3rd world” women or ignored the needs and political situations of women in the Global South. Transnational feminists argue that Western feminist projects to “save” women in another region do not actually liberate these women, since this approach constructs the women as passive victims devoid of agency to save themselves. These “saving” projects are especially problematic when they are accompanied by Western military intervention. For instance, in the war on Afghanistan, begun shortly after 9/11 in 2001, U.S. military leaders and George Bush often claimed to be waging the war to “save” Afghani women from their patriarchal and domineering men. This crucially ignores the role of the West—and the US in particular—in supporting Islamic fundamentalist regimes in the 1980s. Furthermore, it positions women in Afghanistan as passive victims in need of Western intervention—in a way strikingly similar to the victimizing rhetoric often used to talk about “victims” of gendered violence (discussed in an earlier section). Therefore, transnational feminists challenge the notion—held by many feminists in the West—that any area of the world is inherently more patriarchal or sexist than the West because of its culture or religion through arguing that we need to understand how Western imperialism, global capitalism, militarism, sexism, and racism have created conditions of inequality for women around the world.

In conclusion, third wave feminism is a vibrant mix of differing activist and theoretical traditions. Third wave feminism’s insistence on grappling with multiple points-of-view, as well as its persistent refusal to be pinned down as representing just one group of people or one perspective, may be its greatest strong point. Similar to how queer activists and theorists have insisted that “queer” is and should be open-ended and never set to mean one thing, third wave feminism’s complexity, nuance, and adaptability become assets in a world marked by rapidly shifting political situations. The third wave’s insistence on coalitional politics as an alternative to identity-

based politics is a crucial project in a world that is marked by fluid, multiple, overlapping inequalities.

In conclusion, this unit has developed a relational analysis of feminist social movements, from the first wave to the third wave, while understanding the limitations of categorizing resistance efforts within an oversimplified framework of three distinct “waves.” With such a relational lens, we are better situated to understand how the tactics and activities of one social movement can influence others. This lens also facilitates an understanding of how racialized, gendered, and classed exclusions and privileges lead to the splintering of social movements and social movement organizations. This type of intersectional analysis is at the heart not only of feminist activism but of feminist scholarship. The vibrancy and longevity of feminist movements might even be attributed to this intersectional reflexivity—or, the critique of race, class, and gender dynamics in feminist movements. The emphasis on coalitional politics and making connections between several movements is another crucial contribution of feminist activism and scholarship. In the 21st century, feminist movements confront an array of structures of power: global capitalism, the prison system, war, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and transphobia, among others. What kind of world do we wish to create and live in? What alliances and coalitions will be necessary to challenge these structures of power? How do feminists, queers, people of color, trans people, disabled people, and working-class people go about challenging these structures of power? These are among some of the questions that feminist activists are grappling with now, and their actions point toward a deepening commitment to an intersectional politics of social justice and praxis.

\*References for content found on this page are located here [Reference list from Introduction to Women Gender Sexuality Studies](#)