

## Sociological Perspective on Gender

The constructionist perspective: a group or society coming to an agreement on a topic. It becomes taken for granted that often becomes natural or inevitable.

### Constructionism vs. essentialism

- ▽ Gender: cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity.
- ▽ Sex: perceived biological distinctions between men and women.

Both “gender” and “sex” are social constructions.

Masculinity and femininity are social agreements, not ontological facts.

We tend to accept what is usual as natural

What does it mean to be “constructed?” What does it mean to be a “construct?”

- ▽ Pants are a social construct. People come to an agreement about what are and aren’t “pants”
- ▽ The color of pink as referencing femininity is a social construct. People come to an agreement about markers of femininity.
- ▽ Thinness as a feminine ideal is a social construct. People come to an agreement about ideal body types. This changes over time. Ideal body image varies cross-culturally.

### The construction of femininity

- ▽ Signifiers of femininity in the U.S. (like the color pink) vary historically
- ▽ Ideal femininity (like thinness) varies historically and cross-culturally
- ▽ Femininity is not some objective fact about women. It is a social construction

### Gender essentialism

The belief in hard-wired, essential differences between men and women that stem from in-born, biological, and evolutionary distinctions.

- ▽ “Why women are better at shopping than men” – over many thousands of years evolution has designed women to excel when it comes to hunting down the most fulfilling food.
- ▽ Women’s desire to look like Barbie—small waist, large breasts, blond hair, and blue eyes—is a realistic and sensible response to the desire of men to mate with women who look like her. Men are unconsciously seeking healthier and more fertile women when they seek women with small waists.”
- ▽ Why Men Gamble & Women Buy Shoes: There’s nothing inherently masculine about gambling. As women attain economic and social parity with men, we will see a rise in female gamblers.
- ▽ Sociologists tend to reject gender essentialism because it is ahistorical. Essentialist arguments fail to account for historical change. It downplays cultural factors.

## Hegemonic masculinity and femininity

- ▽ Hegemony: implies dominance of one group over another and describes a condition where the subordinate group is dependent upon the powerful group, and buys into the criteria of judgment or culture set forth by the majority group.

## What is socialization?

- ▽ Lifelong process of inheriting and disseminating norms, customs, and ideologies, providing an individual with the skills and habits necessary for participating within his or her own society. Socialization is thus the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained.
- ▽ Learning how to be a human.
- ▽ Resocialization: preexisting roles, identities, and norms are changed in a new environment.
- ▽ Agents of socialization: parents, educators, peers, and mass media. People who are with the individual the first few years of life.
- ▽ Children who are born are “feral” children. - Unsocialized.

## What does gender socialization do?

- ▽ it begins at a young age
- ▽ starts with gendered toys, computers, and books
- ▽ Self-fulfilling prophecies: a prediction that causes itself to be true.
  - “girls are bad at math” → “so, studying math is futile” → poor math scores
- ▽ institutional discrimination: discrimination that has been a part of the structures, processes and procedures of organizations
- ▽ glass ceilings: invisible and unbreakable barriers to economic advancement face by otherwise qualified women and racial and ethnic minorities
- ▽ At birth, sons are described by parents as bigger, stronger, and hardier compared to daughters.

## Structure and agency

- ▽ Agency: desires, intentions, creativity, ability to express yourself. Ability to make choices. Freewill.
- ▽ Structure: social norms structure the way behave. The government. Media. Pop culture. Family. Class. Race. Gender. School. Religion. - affect the choices we make. Social structure effects what our agency looks like. Social context that gives you the choices that you have to make.

## Gender in the news

- ▽ student whose athletic career was ended by concussion. She played sports since she was a small child; growing up, she hardly watched anything besides sports center.
- ▽ A local high school places new policy on leggings, jeggings, and tight jeans

## The Second Shift

### ▽ Gender ideology

- An individual's deeply held set of idea about the proper roles of men and women.
- Egalitarian: husbands and wives have equal opportunities at home and in the workplace. The household division of labor is equal and fair.
- Traditional: husbands are the "bread winner" and wives do housework and stay home with the kids
- Transitional: somewhere in between egalitarian and traditional
- Femininity = domesticity. Women may flaunt their independence, but they seldom lose their femininity. If you look at women who are working, you will find them, between business hours, at work on some little thing they would have done if they had been at home
- Women are naturally domestic. The top drawer of their desk is full of feminine things.

### ▽ Gender strategy

- Things couples do to "fit" their gender ideology
- A plan of action where people try to solve a problem, given certain cultural and gender notions
- Today, men do almost a third of housework. Data suggest the changes will last.

### ▽ The Holts

- Social structure: middle class, employment opportunities for Nancy.
- Gender ideologies: Mrs. Egalitarian and Mr. Transitional.
- Gender strategies: upstairs/downstairs myth, passive resistance, dog care, withholding sex.

### ▽ The Delacortes

- Social structure: working class, traditional upbringing, she needs to work.
- Gender ideologies: Mrs. And Mr. Traditional
- Gender strategies: calculated incompetence, myth of "frank does little around the house."

## Gender Constructionism

- ▽ When a girl can't run around with their shirt off like a boy can
- ▽ Guys will make fun of you for doing something that is "unmanly" like giving friends a hug.
- ▽ At McDonalds when you specify your gender to determine the toy you will receive
- ▽ Girls have to sit with their legs crossed or closed and boys don't
- ▽ Younger girls have tea parties and princess parties, boys have sports or super hero themed parties
- ▽ Men mowing the lawn because that's their job

Sociology argues against this model.

## Division of Labor

A look at the amount of time spent on various activities by married men and women ages 25 to 54, with children, who work full time.

*Average hours per day spent:*



*Source: American Time Use Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics*