CHAPTER 4

How Do We Learn Gender?

Gender and Socialization

What's the very first thing you remember? How old were you and what were you doing? Can you remember what you were wearing or who you were with? Is gender an important part of your first memory? Did it matter that you were a little boy or a little girl, or do you think that, at that point, you were aware of yourself as a boy or girl—as a gendered human being? Can you remember the first time you thought of yourself as having a gender? Can you remember the first time someone treated you in a way that was obviously related to your gender? Do you remember a time when you didn't understand what gender was and couldn't necessarily tell the gender of the people around you? What was the gender makeup of your friends in childhood? In adolescence? Today? What kinds of games did you play on the playground, and were there gender differences in those spaces? Can you remember little boys or little girls who didn't seem to hang out with others of the same gender or didn't always act in ways appropriate to their gender? How did other kids and adults treat those children? Were you a "sissy" or a "tom-boy," or did you know other kids who were? What was the gender of the adults in your life when you were younger, and how did that affect your interactions with them? What lessons did grown-ups seem to teach you about gender? What are other ways in which you learned about gender as a child? Has the shape and form that gender takes in your life changed over the course of your life? Is being masculine different when you're 13 as compared to when you're 22? What about when you're 40, and then 65? Does gender become more or less important throughout the course of your own life? Is there ever a time when you get to stop being gendered?

These are the kinds of questions we'll explore in our examination of how we learn gender, or what sociologists call *gender socialization*. **Socialization** is a fundamental concept for sociologists in general, and it is defined as the ways in which we learn to become a member of any group, including the very large group we call humanity. The process of socialization begins the moment we are born and continues throughout our lives to the very end, as we constantly learn how to successfully belong to new groups or adjust to changes in the groups to which we already belong. It's not surprising given the importance of socialization to sociology as a whole that gender socialization is a good place to start in our examination of how gender matters in our everyday lives. In looking at gender

socialization, we go back to our very beginnings, to the very moment when we were born. But we also consider all the moments since then, and throughout a person's life. There are many different theories of exactly how gender socialization occurs, each with its own unique perspective on exactly what gender socialization is and how it happens. Nonetheless, we can formulate a general definition of **gender socialization** as the process through which individuals learn the gender norms of their society and come to develop an internal gender identity. This definition contains two other terms with which we should also become familiar, *gender norms* and *gender identity*. **Gender norms** are the sets of rules for what is appropriate masculine and feminine behavior in a given culture. In the sex role theory we discussed in Chapter 2, collections of gender norms are what make up a sex role, a set of expectations about how someone labeled a man or someone labeled a woman should behave. The way in which being feminine or masculine, a woman or a man, becomes an internalized part of the way we think about ourselves is our **gender identity**. You might think of gender identity as a way of describing how gender becomes internal—something that becomes an integral part of who we are, a part that many of us would be reluctant to completely abandon. The concept of gender identity is therefore consistent with an individual approach to gender, focusing on how gender operates from the inside (gender identity) out. Gender socialization begins in all societies from the very moment we are born, but in most societies, gender socialization presumes the ability to look at a new infant and give it a sex. In contemporary Anglo-European society, this means to put an infant into one of two categories, male or female. But before we discuss different ways of thinking about gender socialization as well as explore how this process takes place throughout our lives, let's begin with the first step of deciding who's male, who's female, and who's something else entirely.

SORTING IT ALL OUT: SEX ASSIGNMENT AS THE FIRST STEP IN GENDER SOCIALIZATION

Thinking about gender socialization involves thinking about how people began to treat you as a boy or a girl from the very moment you were born. But how would people respond to a baby that is not clearly a boy or a girl? What color would parents use to decorate the baby's room, and what name would they choose? How would they talk about such a baby when gender is built into the very structure of our language (he/she, his/her)? What kind of toys would relatives and friends give to such a baby, and what would this child do when preschool teachers first instructed the children to form two lines, one for boys and one for girls? Even worse, which locker room would this child go to and what would happen in the already anxious and insecure world of the locker room? These may seem like hypothetical questions, but they lie at the core of an ongoing controversy about the very real cases of **intersexed** children—individuals who for a variety of reasons do not fit into the contemporary Anglo-European biological sex categories of male and female. These individuals are important to our discussions of gender socialization because they provide us with insight into a very good sociological question: How can we tell if a baby is male or female? This is a good sociological question because at first glance, it seems like a pretty stupid question. Even a child knows the answer to that question, although you might get some interesting responses depending on the age and upbringing if you try asking some children how you can tell the

difference between boys and girls. Still, many people would find it a stupid question because it seems to have a rather obvious answer. But sociology as a discipline is good at taking the stupid questions and making them a little bit more complicated than they first appear.

So let's explore this stupid question that will take us into some interesting anatomical territory. When a baby is born, how do we tell if it's male or female? Let's start with a case from the United States. Here, with our overall affluence and the availability of the latest medical technology, we assume that many couples can tell even before a baby is born whether it's a boy or a girl. What is it we're looking for in the grainy picture from the ultrasound in which babies often hardly resemble a human, let alone a boy or girl? The presence or absence of a penis. This is the same thing doctors are looking for when a baby is born. If the baby has a penis, clearly he's a boy. If the baby lacks a penis, clearly she's a girl (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Case closed. But here's another stupid question. How do you tell the difference between a penis, which we clearly think of as a part of male anatomy, and a clitoris, which is clearly something that only females have? You may think we've really gone off the deep end here, but would you be surprised to know that doctors and medical researchers have a very precise answer to that question? A baby has a penis if his genitalia are longer than 2.5 centimeters. A baby has a clitoris if her genitalia are shorter than 1.0 centimeters. Penises in males and clitorises in females develop from the same, undifferentiated organ in embryos, called a **genital tubercle**. So both organs have a common origin. What's important at birth in places like the United States is the length those organs have reached, and the existence of specific criteria for doctors tells us that the difference between those two organs is not as obvious as we might have initially assumed. And if you're paying attention, you may have noticed that there's an ambiguous space between 1.0 and 2.5 centimeters. What happens to these infants?

External genitalia are one way we believe we can tell the difference between males and females, but when infants are born with ambiguous genitalia, doctors and other medical professionals move onto other markers of biological sex. The length of an infant's clitoris/penis is not the only way in which ambiguous genitalia can occur at birth. There are cases of intersexed individuals who are born with both a penis (or enlarged clitoris, depending on your point of view) and a vagina. In all these cases of ambiguous external genitalia, doctors begin to investigate other indicators of biological sex, including the presence or absence of internal sex organs. They look for testes as indicators of maleness and ovaries and a uterus as indicators of femaleness. But this too can be a problematic way of determining biological sex. Intersexed infants can have a testis (male organ) on one side of their body and an ovary (female organ) on the other side. In other cases, the ovary and testes grow together into one organ that is indistinguishable as either an ovary or a testis and is therefore called an *ovotestis* (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). In these cases, internal sex organs do not provide any easier answer to the question of the infant's biological sex than do external anatomy.

In the not so distant past, this may have been the scientific and technological limit of our ability to distinguish between males and females. But in a basic biology course at some point, you probably learned that there is also a genetic difference between males and females. Females are marked by a pair of XX chromosomes, while males are marked by XY chromosomes. Genetics, then, should surely be able to definitively solve the problem of determining biological sex. But unfortunately, even at the chromosomal level, things are not so black and white. In general, females are XX and males are XY, but some individuals can be XO, which means they lack a second chromosome (usually a second X chromosome). In the case of Klinefelter syndrome, individuals have an extra X chromosome,

resulting in an XXY pattern. Obviously, these genetic patterns have effects on how other measures of biological sex are expressed, so that those with XO patterns (called Turner syndrome) do not develop ovaries or the secondary sex characteristics (body changes at puberty and menstruation) associated with being female. Those with Klinefelter's syndrome are infertile and often develop breasts at puberty despite having male genitalia. Even at the level of our DNA, there is no simple answer to the question of how to tell if a baby is male or female.

CULTURAL ARTIFACT 1: SEX CATEGORY, SPORTS, AND THE OLYMPICS

Have you ever stopped to think why almost all sports are divided by sex category? Why do we have the NBA and the WNBA, women's and men's World Cup Soccer, baseball for men and softball for women? Can you think of any sports that aren't segregated based on sex category, and then can you explain why? Neither horse racing nor race car driving are segregated by sex category. Why not? Increasing numbers of girls are choosing to wrestle in middle school, high school, and college. Why is wrestling emerging as a sport that doesn't need to be segregated by sex category? Little league baseball is often mixed sex until around puberty, when girls are funneled into softball and boys into baseball. Are there anatomical differences that make it impossible for women to throw or hit a baseball? The case of a 16-year-old girl recently drafted by a professional baseball team in Japan seems to suggest the answer is probably no ("Girl," 2008). In this world of strictly enforced sex segregation, how do sports officials go about ensuring that everyone is, in fact, the sex they claim to be? The Olympics began sex testing in 1968, in response to the masculine appearance of some "female" athletes, many of whom were pumped up on steroids (Saner, 2008). These tests involved detailed physical examinations by a series of doctors and were experienced as humiliating and invasive to the female athletes who had to undergo them. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) later switched to the presumably more sophisticated and less invasive technique of chromosomal testing. The problem that quickly emerged was that given that about 1 in 1,000 individuals exhibit some kind of intersex condition, a surprising number of women demonstrated some chromosomal abnormality that deviated from a strict female, XX. In the 1996 Atlanta games, eight female athletes failed chromosomal sex tests, but seven were cleared on appeal because they were found to have an intersex condition (Saner, 2008). The IOC has abolished universal sex testing, but when challenged, female athletes in the Beijing Olympics were still called upon to prove their sex category. What about the male athletes? Is their sex category tested? The sex category of male Olympic athletes has never been universally tested or challenged. Why? The presumption is that a biological female competing among biological males would gain no advantage. A

woman passing herself off as a man in Olympic competition isn't cheating in the way a man passing himself off as a woman would be. This is true despite the fact that in sports like wrestling and boxing, where competitors are sorted by weight class, there is no advantage that necessarily accrues to men. In long distance running, women's times have been consistently catching up to men's (Lorber, 1994). Do women really need to be protected from competing with men? Can you imagine a world of sports that is not structured on segregation by sex category?

You might be thinking at this point, that's all good and fine. But how often do any of these things actually happen? How often do doctors have to measure the size of a baby's penis/clitoris, examine his/her internal sex organs, or analyze his/her DNA to determine his/her sex? There are many different ways in which individuals can be intersexed, as well as debates about exactly what makes someone intersexed, and these affect the various estimates as to the frequency of intersexuality. In addition, coming up with an exact number for frequency of intersexuality is difficult given that methods of reporting and data collection are hampered by the fact that being intersexed or having an intersexed infant is highly stigmatized and would therefore tend toward people hiding their status rather than reporting it. Nonetheless, some of the most reliable estimates put the number of infants who are born with an intersexed condition that merits some kind of surgery for genital reconstruction at 1 or 2 per 2,000 children (Preves, 2003). If you broaden the category to include not just those who require surgery at birth, but those with chromosomal, gonadal (having to do with internal sex organs), genital, or hormonal intersexed features, the prevalence in the population has been estimated as high as 2 %. Other reports estimate that between 1 % and 4 % of the population is intersexed, and in some populations, inheritable types of intersexuality can be as common as 1 in every 300 births (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). To compare to the prevalence of other kinds of conditions, intersexuality is more common by most estimates than albinism, or the condition of lacking any pigment in the hair or skin (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Intersexuality occurs about as often as cystic fibrosis and Down syndrome, two conditions that are more familiar to most of us and certainly cause considerable less shame for parents and family members (Preves, 2003). If you go with an estimate as high as 4 % of the population, intersexuality in all its forms would be as common as having red hair. Intersexed individuals have occurred throughout history and across many different societies. A more common term you may have heard for intersexed individuals, **hermaphrodites**, comes from the Greek name for a mythical figure formed from the fusion of a man and a woman. Even though many people may consider intersexed individuals to be abnormal, they are not *unnatural* any more than any other babies born with any other trait are seen as unnatural; intersexuality can be an inheritable trait, and it appears with some frequency in the human population. The existence of intersexed people is only unnatural if you believe that the existence of only two biological sexes itself *is* natural.

It is this point that makes the case of intersexed individuals important and interesting to our general discussion of gender, sex, and gender socialization. Many of those who study gender wonder why, given the existence of a rather large group of people who do not fit into the categories of male or female, we don't change the categories or acknowledge that maybe the categories don't work? If people are frequently born who are not really either male or female according to any of the biological criteria that we believe determine whether you're male or female, then are the categories of male and female really natural after all? This should sound familiar as a strong social constructionist approach to sexual dimorphism. The strong social constructionist approach posits that gender is what leads to the notion of sex. It is our belief in fundamental differences between women and men that leads us to believe there are two distinct biological categories called male and female. We stick to this notion even when the evidence of intersexed individuals contradicts that reality. A good example of how you might argue this works from a strong social constructionist perspective is the important criteria for penis/clitoris length we discussed previously. Why did doctors decide that 2.5 centimeters is the crucial length at which this genital organ becomes a penis? What biological imperative makes 2.5 centimeters such an important length? There are two considerations that make 2.5 an important number for doctors. First, doctors believe a penis/clitoris any shorter than 2.5 centimeters prevents little boys from peeing standing up. It doesn't interfere with their ability to rid their bodies of urine, which would be a fairly pressing medical and biological problem. Doctors feel 2.5 centimeters is an important cutoff because otherwise boys are not able to participate in the important *social* experience of peeing standing up with other little boys. The length is about avoiding that social stigma, even though there is no biological or medical reason men need to stand up to pee or reason why men should have to pee standing up. (In fact, both males and females can pee standing up, though Western toilets make this more difficult for people without penises.) The second consideration used to explain the 2.5 centimeter criteria is the ability of intersexed infants to use their penis/clitoris to have penetrative vaginal intercourse with a woman (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). This consideration exists despite the fact that some individuals, intersexed or not, have had successful sexual experiences with vaginal intercourse, including fathering a child in one instance, with penises that were shorter than the 2.5 centimeter criteria (Reilly & Woodhouse, 1989) This second criterion is also fundamentally *social* rather than based on any biological imperative. It assumes that in order to be a normal male you must be heterosexual and, therefore, need to be able to have sex (and a very specific kind of sex) with a woman. It also assumes that all heterosexual males need to be able to have penetrative sex with a woman. What about males who become celibate, like priests? What about males who enjoy other forms of sexual activity, with other men or women, that do not involve vaginal penetration?

These criteria being used to determine what is supposedly a biological category reflect our deeply held social assumptions about the differences between women and men. In other words, the criteria reflect our assumptions about *gender,* and so in this specific instance, gendered ideas about what is important to male behavior informs our understanding of "biological" categories of *sex*. As the strong social constructionists would say, our gendered views of the world make us try to impose sex categories on a much more

complex reality; gender creates sex. Another argument in this vein points to the ways in which doctors in contemporary Anglo-European societies focus solely on the functionality of a male penis, as opposed to other criteria from other time periods and cultures. During the late 19th century, when gender ideas were different, biological sex among the sexually ambiguous was also determined differently. The presence or absence of ovaries was the crucial litmus test for sex assignment, rather than the size of any external organ (Lorber, 1994). This was because the gender views of this time period told them that a woman is only a woman if she can procreate. In our more scientific world today, there is no consideration given to the presence of ovaries or the status of an intersexed infant's vagina and its suitability for penetrative intercourse. What might this reveal about our own assumptions about what makes males and females?

> **?** How does using penis length as the criterion for establishing sex reinforce the idea that to be male is the norm and to be female is to deviate from that norm? What does that imply about our society, and how would a society in which being female is seen as the norm be different?

Why is this rather intimate discussion of genitalia and genetics an important starting place for a larger discussion of gender socialization? The study of intersexed individuals has often lain at the crossroads of debates about the relative importance of nature versus nurture in determining what we think of as gender. The current status quo among doctors and the medical profession regarding intersexed infants is to pick a sex and perform surgery and other medical interventions to bring the baby's gender into line with the chosen sex. So if an infant has a vagina and also an oversized clitoris/penis, her clitoris will be surgically shortened and she will be raised as a female. The goal is to not to preserve reproductive ability or physical sensation, but to take the path that creates the maximum potential for normal-looking genitalia. Because a functional and cosmetically appropriate penis is more difficult to construct surgically, many intersexed individuals become females. In many of these cases, repeated surgeries may sometimes be necessary over the course of the individual's life, and sometimes individuals take hormones to induce appropriate secondary sex characteristics when they reach puberty. So an intersexed individual who is being raised as a male and develops breasts at puberty might be given testosterone to correct this problem. Sometimes testes, ovaries, or ovo-testes also need to be surgically removed. We'll talk about the repercussions for the development of the intersexed person in more detail later, but the process of creating a sex for an intersexed individual can be fairly involved, time-consuming, and painful. But the standard medical protocol for dealing with intersexed infants in the United States assumes that nurture (how a child is raised) can trump nature (the complexities of the sexual biology with which they may have been born).

CULTURAL ARTIFACT 2: TRANGENDER KIDS

Eight-year-old Brandon Simms's first complete sentence was, "I like your high heels." As a toddler, Brandon would search his house for towels, doilies, and bandanas to drape over his head, which his mother now imagines was intended to give him the feeling of having long hair. In toy stores, Brandon would head straight for the Barbie aisles despite being guided by his mother toward the gender neutral puzzles or building blocks. At two and a half, Brandon's mother finally allowed him to take one of his cousin's Barbie dolls home, and Brandon proceeded to carry it with him everywhere, even to bed. At three, Brandon's mother found him dancing naked in front of the mirror with his penis tucked between his legs, declaring, "Look, Mom, I'm a girl" (Rosin, 2008). Brandon is one of a growing number of young children diagnosed with gender identity disorder and identified as being transgender. In Anglo-European societies, the number of adults diagnosed with gender identity disorder has tripled since the 1960s. Those who treat gender identity disorder have seen the average age of their patients drop dramatically in recent years. What exactly does it mean to be transgendered or to have gender identity disorder, and how should parents deal with children like Brandon who seem determined that they are living in a body that does not correspond to their gender? For some, the increasing prevalence of gender identity disorder in young children is evidence that the brain itself is gendered; transgender children's insistence that their anatomical sex is incorrect is seen as evidence that gender identity is influenced by some innate or immutable biological factors. Yet, no definitive research has established a biological basis for gender identity disorder or for being transgender in general, and other researchers believe gender identity disorder can be treated psychologically. For Dr. Kenneth Zucker, gender identity disorder is the result of instability or traumatic experiences in early infancy or childhood, and if caught early enough (before the age of 6), it can be treated through family therapy and intervention. Other parents are choosing to help their transgender children navigate a potentially traumatic social life by giving them drugs called puberty blockers. These drugs delay the onset of puberty with its irreversible effects on biological sex (Adam's apples or facial and body hair in boys, or the development of breasts in girls) in order to give children more time to decide on their actual gender identity. How do we explain the increasing number of children who are diagnosed with gender identity disorder and become transgender? Is this a natural phenomenon that Anglo-European societies are just beginning to recognize? What do our methods for dealing with these children reveal about our own investment in the gender system?

This debate about the relative weights of nature versus nuture is an old one, and it is big enough for its own textbook. What we do know is that there's a great deal of biological diversity out there that doesn't fit into the prescribed sex categories of Anglo-European society. We also know that there's a great deal of variety in how individual people and whole societies form the connections between sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Anne Fausto-Sterling (1993), whose critique of evolutionary psychology you read about in Chapter 3, proposed that we should have five sexes instead of two. The five sexes would be male, male hermaphrodite (merm), true hermaphrodite, female hermaphrodite (ferm), and female. Her categories suggest something less like a set of discrete categories (you're either male or female, but never both) and more like a continuum (you're more or less male or female, but it's possible to possess both to varying degrees). Her article was seen by many as a fairly radical potential solution to the situation of intersexed individuals, but it was also liberating to many intersexed individuals who read the article; for perhaps the first time, they saw themselves described as something more than an abnormality or medical curiosity. They were, instead, the touchstone for a larger conversation about the appropriateness of our existing sex categories.

The process of gender socialization begins with the process of an infant being labeled either male or female. But though we imagine the identification of the sex of a baby as a fairly normal and unproblematic event, that is not always the case. This teaches us important lessons about the connections between gender and sex, but it also helps us with an important lesson we'll be emphasizing throughout this book. In telling a story about gender socialization, it is tempting to begin with the "typical" or "normal" story of gender socialization and then to demonstrate all the ways in which one might deviate from that typical story. But what would that typical story look like? Is the most typical story of gender socialization about a girl or a boy? That may seem like a pointless question, but remember that Freud felt the gender development of boys was normal compared to the pathological and problematic development of girls. Would a typical story of gender socialization result in a heterosexual individual? From the very beginnings of research into what we now call homosexuality, scholars explored the idea that this behavior resulted from some kind of basic failure of gender socialization. Would the typical story of gender socialization be that of a white, middle-class child in the developed world, even though being either white, middle class, or in the developed world puts you in a numerical minority globally? (The majority of the world's population is not white, nor middle class, nor living in the developed world.) Would the typical story of gender socialization be about an intersexed individual? You could argue for the typicalness of intersexed individuals' stories of socialization because they reveal in obvious ways what is implicit in the gender socialization stories of all of us. Our sex and gender don't always line up in the ways perfectly predicted by a typical story of gender socialization. Some of us who consider ourselves women pursue masculine careers. Some of us who consider ourselves men relate to other people in ways that are considered more feminine. The case of intersexed people helps us see gender socialization for what it is—a complex, fragile, always incomplete, and less than perfect process. There is no typical story of gender socialization, and so after giving an overview of some basic theories of socialization, we'll focus on stories of socialization selected not

for their typicality or nontypicality, but for the ways in which they help us to ask some interesting questions about this complicated, lifelong process of learning gender.

SOME THEORIES OF GENDER SOCIALIZATION

Theories of gender socialization help us to understand how the three main approaches we outlined in Chapter 2 are interconnected and overlapping. The three theoretical approaches or levels we laid out are individual, interactional, and institutional. In discussing integrative theories of gender, we talked about how perhaps the best approach to gender is one that acknowledges the importance of all of three of these levels. Gender socialization can be understood at the individual level because it explains the ways in which gender comes to be internalized by individuals. Gender socialization is the story of how gender comes to be located inside individuals. Remember this is the emphasis of an individual approach—how gender operates from the inside out—so you could argue looking at gender socialization is a good example of an individual approach. In fact, many of the theories of gender socialization we'll examine come from the discipline of psychology, with its emphasis on individuals as a unit of analysis. But seeing gender socialization solely as individualist leaves out an important part of the equation for how we learn gender.

Gender becomes internalized through our interactions with those around us. In sociological vocabulary, the person being socialized is the **target of socialization**. The people, groups, and institutions who are doing the socializing are the **agents of socialization**. Though the theories we'll discuss conceive of that interaction in different ways and suggest very different roles for the target of socialization, they all agree that interaction with our society is the central mechanism through which socialization takes place. So gender socialization can also be examined at an interactional level.

What about institutions? Note that in the definition of agents of socialization, we included not just other individuals, but also groups and institutions. Institutions such as the family, school, and religion play important roles in the process of gender socialization. The role of the media as an institution has also become increasingly important in contemporary gender socialization. Understanding gender socialization should then employ all three of these levels at which gender operates. As you read about the following theories, think about the extent to which they examine the process of gender socialization at all three of these levels.

Social Learning Theory

When we talk about theories in a textbook or lecture, we often pretend that theories fit into neat, self-contained boxes. This is what we call radical feminism, and this is liberal feminism, and of course, anyone can tell that the two are nothing alike. Presenting theories in this way is a bit too orderly compared to the messiness of the real world, where very few dedicated academics go around labeling themselves a social learning theorist as opposed to a gender-schema theorist. In the real world, people pick and choose the theory as it suits their needs, so feel free to do the same yourself. In the real world, theories often develop

by building on the material of previous theories. So often, the theories we discuss as distinct and separate also have a great deal in common. Perhaps this is yet another symptom of our obsession with differences, whether they are gender differences or theoretical differences. Regardless, in order to help understand theories, it's useful to know the ways in which newer theories evolved out of already existing theories. You can choose to think of this process as an evolution toward a final and ultimately better theory. Or you can take more of a queer theory perspective and choose to think of it as a good example of how our ways of seeing and understanding gender shift over time and with historical context, minus the assumption that we're getting any closer to an ultimate truth.

Social learning theory developed in psychology from the legacy of behaviorism. You might be familiar with behaviorism as associated with B. F. Skinner and the ability to shape the behavior of rats based on a system of punishments and rewards. Behaviorism as a theoretical approach pushed psychology in a more scientific direction, or at least in a direction that many psychologists believed was more scientific than the one pointed to by Freud. This meant an emphasis on the collection of observable, empirical data (Siann, 1994). The unconscious drives Freud studied were hard to directly observe, but with behaviorism the emphasis was on what *could* be directly observed: real human behavior—or sometimes, as with Skinner, the behavior of rats. Behaviorism claimed that behavior in humans was learned; so behaviorists were interested in discovering exactly *how* we learn those behaviors. Their primary answer is that we learn through a process of rewards and punishments, or through a carrot and stick approach. When an infant smiles at her parent for the first time, she receives rewards in the form of verbal praise, attention, and affection. The behavior is rewarded, and chances are the baby will try smiling again in the very near future. When a toddler knocks his plate of food off the table, he may or may not get scolded, but at the very least, he *doesn't* get verbal praise and affection. According to social learning theory, this is basically how we learn, through the selective rewarding, withholding of rewards, or punishing of behavior. If you've been around infants, you've probably noticed that they can learn some fairly interesting behaviors from within a limited repertoire of what they're capable of at that age through this process.

It's fairly easy to see how these basic ideas apply to the specific process of gender socialization. Social learning theorists identified specific **sex-typed behaviors** (Mischel, 1970). A behavior is sex-typed when it is more expected and therefore seen as appropriate when performed by one sex, but less expected and therefore seen as inappropriate when performed by the other sex. Making a list of sex-typed behaviors results in the articulation of a gender or sex role, which we've already discussed, so sex-typed behaviors are also similar to the concept of gender norms. The idea of sex-typed behaviors adds the idea, not necessarily contained in the idea of gender norms, that we very purposefully categorize behaviors as appropriate to one sex but not the other. Gender socialization works, according to social learning theorists, by rewarding children for engaging in sex-typed behavior that is consistent with their assigned sex category. The classic example is crying; while a little girl may be soothed when she cries, a little boy may be told that boys don't cry. Crying is a sex-typed behavior, seen as OK for girls and therefore not a punishable behavior. But because it is not seen as an appropriate behavior for boys, the little boy may be punished or corrected for his crying behavior. Through these kinds of interactions, gender socialization occurs.

? What are some other examples of sex-typed behavior? Can you remember being rewarded, not rewarded, or punished for engaging in a sex-typed behavior when you were growing up? Can you think of instances of when children you know or spend time with have engaged in sex-typed behaviors and been rewarded for those behaviors?

This original formulation of social learning theory described a somewhat conspiratorial role for the agents of socialization, people like parents, teachers, and friends. This is because social learning theory implies something of a conscious effort to differentially reward and punish sex-typed behavior. It calls to mind images of mothers and fathers developing careful plans for the behaviors that will be rewarded and punished in their sons and daughters. In reality, few parents ever sit down and make these kinds of intentional decisions. Social learning theorists subsequently added to their original formulation and said that conscious intent on the part of agents of socialization was not necessary to the process (Bandura, 1963). Latent learning can take place due to the way children tend to imitate those around them, regardless of whether they will be rewarded or not for that imitation. This shifted the focus of social learning theory toward imitation and modeling, but it raised questions as to exactly *who* children were imitating and modeling themselves after. Social learning theorists argue that children are more likely to model themselves on same-sex individuals by paying more attention to same sex peers and forming a stronger bond with same-sex parents. This bond with the same-sex parent depends on a process called **identification**, where a child copies whole patterns of behavior without necessarily being trained or rewarded for doing so (Siann, 1994). This move toward modeling and imitation shifted social learning theory away from the more simplistic model of punishments and rewards as guiding behavior.

Problems emerged when these underlying assumptions of social learning theory were tested using empirical research. According to social learning theory, children should pay more attention to peers of the same-sex and identify more with their same-sex parent. But research suggests that neither of these is necessarily the case. Children in experiments do not always pick a same-sex playmate to model nor do they always identify with a parent of the same sex (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Williams, 1987). Other critiques of social learning theory pointed out the very passive role of targets of socialization in this formulation. Children are seen as largely passive recipients of their culture's ideas about gender and sex-typing, and there is little room for seeing children as playing an active role in this process.

Cognitive-Development Theory

The next theory emerges from this specific critique of social learning theory and reflects another general shift in psychology as a discipline. Behaviorism faded in importance within psychology during the middle part of the 20th century (Siann, 1994). The specific area in psychology dealing with socialization came under the influence of the Swiss theorist Jean Piaget. Piaget (1954) directly contradicted social learning theory by emphasizing children's active role in their own socialization rather than seeing them as

passive recipients of socialization. In addition, Piaget brought to the psychological study of socialization an emphasis on the stages of children's cognitive development. This was a somewhat radical approach to child development because it implied that children were not "little adults," but were fundamentally different in the way they think, feel, and understand the world around them. Kohlberg (1966) used Piaget's models of child development to create a new psychological theory of gender socialization, commonly called **cognitive-development theory**. This theory seeks to explain the ways in which children acquire a sense of a gender identity and the ability to gender-type themselves and others. We've already discussed gender identity as the internalized sense of yourself as male or female. Gender typing is another term for sex-typing, for identifying behaviors that are seen as appropriate for one sex or gender but not the other. Children acquire gender identity and learn to gender-type as they progress through a series of discrete, fixed developmental stages. The emphasis throughout is on how children actively develop an understanding of gender, and then, based on that understanding, they actively socialize themselves, rather than serving as passive objects of socialization.

The first stage happens between the ages of two and a half and three, when children acquire a gender identity. Children of this age should be able to correctly identify their own gender as well as identifying the gender of others around them. If you've been around small children, you may have noticed that we're certainly not born with the ability to distinguish gender—it is something that has to be learned. Hence, the two year old who points to people on TV or, sometimes more embarrassingly (though it's interesting to think about why it's embarrassing when a child cannot correctly identify someone's gender), a friend or relative and asks, "Is he a boy or a girl?" By the age of five, children have acquired gender stability, according to cognitive development theory. With **gender stability**, children know that their gender is permanent, and that it is the gender they will be for the rest of their lives. This seems fairly obvious to us, but, interestingly, not to children. The son of one of my students is pretty typical in having expressed the desire at one point to grow up and become a mommy, implying that he would be able to change his gender at some point in the future. Once a little boy has achieved gender stability, he understands that by and large he cannot become a mommy. It is not until the age of seven, according to cognitive-development theory, that children reach the final phase of gender understanding: gender constancy. With gender constancy, children develop the complicated understanding that even a male wearing a dress, a wig, or makeup is still fundamentally a male. **Gender constancy** brings an understanding that even changing the outward physical appearance of a person does not change their underlying sex category. Up until this stage, children's understanding of gender is still limited and based on very concrete rules (e.g., girls have long hair, boys have beards) (Siann, 1994).

Though the process of gender socialization for cognitive developmentalists begins when children develop a gender identity, at the age of two and a half to three years, actual gender-typing does not begin until children achieve gender constancy at age seven. At that point, children begin to actively select from their environment the behaviors that they see as consistent with their gender identity. The basic idea is that once a little girl begins to see herself and others as gendered, she will be self-motivated to engage in feminine behaviors and to model herself on the other people she identifies as women in her environment. This is driven in part by children's need for cognitive consistency; if children know what their gender is, then what they do and think should line up with that gender (Bem, 1983).

Children work to achieve **gender congruency** and, in the process, achieve gender socialization. Children do not become fully sex-typed until they have achieved the final stage of gender constancy at around age seven. Cognitive development theory does not completely dismiss the importance of the external environment, or of society itself. Society obviously provides the material from which children pick and choose to achieve gender-congruency. But it does locate much more of the power in the process of socialization with the targets (children) rather than with the agents of socialization.

Both social learning theory and cognitive development theory largely predate the broad influence of second wave feminism on academic disciplines like psychology. Both theories are general theories of socialization that can be applied to the specific question of gender socialization. Given that these theories developed before feminists' entrance into psychology, it's probably not surprising that one of the critiques of cognitive-development theory is its male bias. Kohlberg (1966) focused his theory mostly on the case of young boys, and you can see how the theory can work better for little boys than little girls. From this perspective, children are self-motivated to gender themselves, without the need for much external pressure. It makes sense in a male-dominated world that boys would be motivated to adopt a masculine gender identity. Being masculine brings with it power and privilege. But if children are savvy enough to work on developing gender congruency, they're probably also smart enough to work out that being feminine is not quite as valued in our society as being masculine. Cognitive development theory had difficulties explaining this differential dynamic between little girls and little boys. Other critiques based in empirical research point out that children begin to demonstrate preferences for objects and activities based on gender by the age of three (Unger & Crawford, 1992). This contradicts the predictions of cognitive development theory that children will not begin to engage in gender-typing until gender constancy is achieved at age seven. If you've been around children younger than age seven, you might have noticed that as a group they're fairly invested in gender. Generally, cognitive development theory seems to place the process of gender development fairly late in childhood.

Gender Schema Theory

The next two theories emerge from the specific context of an increasing influence of feminism in psychology and of feminist psychologists bringing their own perspective to the topic of gender socialization. The first is **gender schema theory**, which builds on the frameworks of both cognitive development and social learning theory to formulate an explanation that is specific to gender socialization, rather than to socialization as a more general process. This theory was developed by Sandra Bem, and one of her critiques of cognitive development theory was that it provided no explanation for why children socialized themselves based on sex as a category in particular. Bem (1983, 1993) questioned why sex became the important organizing principle around which children built their identities, rather than other readily available categories such as race, religion, or even eye color. Bem called this the "why sex?" question; why is it that sex becomes such an important difference in the lives of very young children. Because the theory of cognitive development does not provide an answer or address how its theory might address these other categories of difference as well, Bem (1983) argued there's a presumption that sex differences are "naturally and inevitably" (p. 602) more important to children than other differences. This is

connected to a more general problem with cognitive development theory; the theory errs too far on the side of privileging individual behavior and decisions. As Bem (1983) noted, in cognitive development theory, children seem to largely socialize themselves, in the "absence of any external pressure to behave in a sex-stereotyped manner" (p. 601). Gender schema theory seeks to correct this swing away from the external pressures important to social learning theory by finding a balance between the two.

How does gender schema theory find this balance? As the name of the theory suggests, it begins with the concept of schemas. A **schema** is a cognitive structure and network of associations that helps to organize an individual's perception of the world (Bem, 1983). According to gender-schema theory, schemas help us organize incoming information and perceptions from the outside world; they serve a kind of sorting and organizing function. More important, they shape the way we look for and experience information as well as what kind of information we integrate into our way of thinking. In this sense, schemas are more than just a system of organization, like a file folder that exists inside our head. Schemas also include the complicated ways in which the files are interconnected, as the file for mother is probably also connected to female, woman, feminine, nurturer, caretaker, and so on. The existence of this schema then shapes the very way in which we perceive the world around us; if our schema about mothers is made up of all these characteristics, we might pay more attention to the mothers we see who line up with all these other qualities, while becoming less likely to perceive the mothers who do not. Schemas are ways of organizing information, but they also become, as Bem (1993) pointed out, lenses that shape the way in which we see the world. A **gender schema**, then, is a cognitive structure that enables us to sort characteristics and behaviors into masculine and feminine categories and then creates various other associations with those categories. Like schemas more generally, gender-schemas also eventually come to shape the ways in which we perceive the world around us, through the lenses of gender. Gender schema theory poses that rather than rose-colored glasses, we all live with gendered-colored glasses that lead us to see the world in some very specifically gendered ways.

Socialization occurs as children assimilate their self-concept, the way they think about themselves, to their gender schema (Bem, 1983). Children learn the content of their particular society's gender schema, or the network of associations around the characteristics of masculine and feminine. They also know that they fall into one or other of those categories based on their own sex. When they begin to think of themselves as masculine or feminine, that particular gender schema is also associated with their sense of identity. They learn that when they are picking behaviors and ways of thinking to assimilate into their own sense of selves, they should limit themselves to the particular subset of behaviors and attitudes appropriate to their own gender. As with cognitive development theory, children are motivated to socialize themselves—but now through the mechanism of the power of gender schema.

So far, gender schema theory doesn't sound that much different from cognitive development in its emphasis on socialization from the inside out. Remember that one of the critiques of cognitive development was that it swings too far away from attention to the role of culture and society. One of Bem's (1983) critiques of cognitive development was that it lacked any explanation for why sex in particular becomes the most important category of organization. Gender schema theory addresses these concerns, and it is here that the theory shifts to processes beyond the individual to the level of society.

Gender in particular becomes an important organizing category because it is seen by almost all cultures as functionally important to society. Gender schemas exist because cultures are structured in such a way as to convince us that society cannot function without the existence of sex and gender categories. Because of the importance placed on gender by most cultures, a very broad set of associations between the categories masculine and feminine and many other attributes, behaviors, and categories come to exist. In other words, gender pervades the way we think about the world and crosscuts many other categories. An example Bem (1983) provided was that people are perfectly and consistently capable in experiments of sorting seemingly gender neutral terms and objects into masculine and feminine categories. In experiments, people will spontaneously sort *tender* and *nightingale* as feminine and *assertive* and *eagle* as masculine, despite the fact that these terms have no clearly gendered content. Gender schemas are particularly important, then, because culture creates and enforces that importance.

> **?** Does it make sense to think of objects and feelings (like *tender, assertive, eagle.* and *nightingale*) as gendered (masculine or feminine)? In some languages, even words like cat and dog have a gender. Is this true in a more subtle way for English, which no longer has gendered forms for many nouns?

In later work, Bem (1993) outlined some of the specific content of gender schemas as they existed in Anglo-European societies, including a history of their cultural evolution. She identified *androcentrism* and *gender polarization* as two important lenses that shape the way we see and understand gender in many parts of the developed world. **Androcentrism** (which we also discussed in Chapter 3) is the belief that masculinity and what men do in our culture is superior to femininity and what women do. Femininity and all it entails are seen as deviations from the universal standard of masculinity. Bem traced a long history of androcentrism in Anglo-European culture, some examples of which are already familiar to us. Freud's theory of gender development is a good example, where having a penis was seen as the norm and women's development was seen as inferior and abnormal due to women's lack of a penis. Androcentrism is also a useful concept for explaining the many ways in which it is sometimes more acceptable for women to engage in masculine behavior than it is for men to engage in feminine behavior. In the United States, most men will get a lot more flack for wearing a skirt or makeup than a woman will receive for wearing men's pants or a man's hat. We will see below how psychoanalytic theory, another theory of gender socialization, has a different explanation for the same types of behaviors.

> **?** Can you think of other examples of androcentrism in society, or ways in which it's more OK for women to act masculine or do masculine things than it is for men to act feminine or do feminine things? Can you think of examples that don't fit this pattern, or examples of times when it's seen as OK for men to act feminine, but not OK for women to act masculine?

Gender polarization, the second important part of how we perceive gender in Anglo-European society, describes the way in which behaviors and attitudes that are viewed as appropriate for men are seen as inappropriate for women and vice versa. Bem (1993) argued that gender polarization operates in two ways. First, it creates two mutually exclusive scripts for being female and male. This means that the script that is appropriate for males is only ever appropriate for males, and no script can ever be appropriate for both males and females. Second, gender polarization problematizes any person who deviates from these mutually exclusive scripts as unnatural, immoral, abnormal, or pathological, depending on the particular system of thought being used. Gender polarization is an important way in which the strong link between sex (as biology), gender, and sexuality is maintained. To be female is to be heterosexual and to be attracted to males, and so lesbian women would be an example of a person who is seen as unnatural, immoral, abnormal, or pathological due to gender polarization. In this later work on the lenses of androcentrism and gender polarization, Bem focused even more attention on the question of **enculturation**, or on how culture comes to reside inside individuals. This shift in gender schema theory brings us back to a balance between the importance of external agents of socialization and active targets shaping their own process of learning gender through the mechanism of gender schemas.

> **?** Can you think of other types of individuals or groups of people who would be problematic according to the system of gender polarization?

Psychoanalytic Theory

The final theory of gender socialization we will explore also draws on psychology as a discipline, but a very different kind of psychology. We discussed Nancy Chodorow in Chapter 3 as an example of a feminist theorist attempting to provide an explanation for women's universal subordination that is based on a social, rather than a biological, explanation. Chodorow (1978) laid out her answer to this question in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering*, and you should be able to guess from the title where she locates her explanation for women's universal subordination. Like gender schema theory, psychoanalytic theory is an explanation specific to the process of gender socialization, rather than beginning as an exploration of the process of socialization more generally. Rather than drawing on cognitive or behaviorist theory, Chodorow began with Freud's legacy of psychoanalysis as important to explaining the key causal factor in women's subordinate position: their status as mothers. **Psychoanalytic theory** begins with the importance of women's status as mothers and uses principles from Freud and others in the psychoanalytic tradition to explain the ways in which gender becomes deeply embedded in the psychic structure of our personalities. This is important to distinguishing psychoanalytic theory from other theories of gender socialization in which gender is a behavioral acquisition, something children pick up in the process of socialization. For psychoanalysts, gender is something that becomes

deeply embedded in our personality structures very early in our development in ways that other theories of gender socialization do not adequately describe.

To understand exactly how this happens, it is necessary to understand a few concepts essential to psychoanalytic theory. The first is identification, here used somewhat differently than it was in the context of social learning theory. **Psychoanalytic identification** is the way in which a child modifies her own sense of self in order to incorporate some ability, attribute, or power she see in others (usually a parent) around them. When a child is developing a sense of right or wrong, he does not just internalize a kind of miniature version of the parent who tells him what is right or wrong. Rather, in identification, that ability to distinguish between right and wrong becomes a part of the child's own sense of self; it becomes a sense of inner regulation for the child (Chodorow, 1978, p. 43). The other important concept is that of **ego boundaries**, another term borrowed from Freud, which describes the sense of personal psychological division between ourselves and the world around us (Chodorow, 1978, p. 68). Ego boundaries are what help us figure out where the stuff called "me" stops and everything else begins. This may seem pretty self-evident, but from a psychoanalytic perspective, it's not as simple as it might seem; we're not born with ego boundaries, they are something we learn and develop in early childhood.

In her formulation of psychoanalytic theory, Chodorow (1978) maintained many of the basic ideas of Freudian theory, including the Oedipal complex. But the end result of these processes is different; rather than focusing on the attainment of gender identity and heterosexuality, psychoanalytic theory is interested in the "relational potential" produced in people of different genders (p. 166). Identification occurs for both boys and girls with their mothers initially, due to the complete dependence of the infant on the mother as primary caregiver. In this very early phase of our development, occurring beyond our ability to consciously remember as adults, we have no sense of ego boundaries between ourselves and our mothers. According to psychoanalytic theory, infants at this stage do not experience themselves as separate from their mothers. Eventually though, infants come to see that though they are completely dependent on their mother for their survival, the reverse is not true; even the most dedicated of mothers has other concerns beyond her infant, and psychoanalytic theory focuses on how boys and girls resolve the tensions caused by this realization. In other words, if Mom has concerns that are not consistent with my own, Mom must actually be separate from me. The process is qualitatively different for boys and girls, which gives us radically different personality structures for men and women as adults.

Not to state the obvious, but female infants are of the same gender as their mother. Because of this similarity, they are able to experience a sense of connection with their mothers for longer than male infants. This is because, conveniently enough, the gender identity they need to learn is available to them much more readily than it is to boys; girls can develop a sense of gender identity through their direct personal relationship with their mothers. In addition, Chodorow (1978) argued that because mothers themselves have already internalized a sense of gender identity, they experience their infant daughters as more similar to them than their infant sons. On some unconscious level, mothers then push their sons away in ways that they do not push their daughters. Due to these early psychological dynamics, girls emerge with a personality structure characterized by empathy and with less of an ability to differentiate themselves from others. Feminine personality structure has less developed ego boundaries.

Male infants have the task before them of acquiring a masculine gender identity, despite the fact that their primary identification is with their mother, who represents feminine gender identity. How do boys acquire this masculine identity in the absence of an initial masculine identification? According to Chodorow, this is a problematic dynamic for masculine development as boys learn masculinity in the absence of an ongoing relationship with a male figure. In addition, to become masculine, boys must sever their sense of connection to and identification with their mothers. Due to these underlying dynamics, masculine personality structure emerges with a much more well-developed sense of their separation from others. Men have stronger ego boundaries than do women. Masculinity is learned by boys in part as a rejection of what is feminine, including their identification with their mother. In the absence of this kind of strong relationship with other men, masculinity is learned by boys through the use of cultural stereotypes, rather than through the kind of direct observation that girls experience with their mothers. This results in two important features of masculine gender identity: it is less stable than feminine gender identity, and it contains, as a basic element, a devaluation of all things feminine.

There are two important features to highlight about psychoanalytic theory. First, it explains not just how gender socialization occurs, but how the same process of gender socialization recreates itself across generations. Girls who emerge from this developmental process more empathetic and with less of a sense of ego boundaries are predisposed to seek out the kind of nurturing involved in mothering, therefore reproducing the same personality structure in their children. These processes of gender development don't just produce generic gender differences; they produce a new generation of women whose personalities lead them to want to mother, and to therefore reproduce again in their own sons and daughters the same inevitable process. In Chapter 8, we will discuss the persistence of women's roles as primary caregivers to children, even in families who consciously attempt a more equitable division of labor. Chodorow's (1978) theory helps explain this persistence because the desire to mother is a fundamental part of feminine personalities. The second feature to note in psychoanalytic theory is that it also helps to explain the subordination of women through the development of masculine personality. Masculinity has a devaluation of women and therefore of the feminine built into its very structure. This neatly explains why women seem to be universally subordinate to men. Seeing women as inferior is an essential part of what it means to be masculine, according to identification theory.

Psychoanalytic theory has had widespread influence and has inspired many studies to explore these dimensions of masculine and feminine personality (Belenky, Clincy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Williams, 1991). Carol Gilligan (1982) used identification theory to argue for a uniquely feminine approach to issues of justice and morality. You might remember from our earlier discussion of Freud that he predicted women would have a much less developed sense of justice and morality. Gilligan used identification theory to argue that women's morality is structured by the fact that they experience less of a sense of separation between themselves and others in their environment. So while traditional ideas of justice assume that right and wrong must be determined by an objective devaluation of empathy and compassion, a more feminine sense of justice is deeply entwined with the idea of being able to take the position of others. Masculine ideas of justice are blind and assume that one can only determine what is just by ignoring the particulars of a person's situation. Feminine justice assumes that the unique set of particulars must

be considered. Other studies have used psychoanalytic theory to explain the experiences of men in predominately female occupations, the attraction of young boys to sports, and gender differences in how women and men learn (Belenky et al., 1997; Messner, 1990; Williams, 1991).

Psychoanalytic theory is a good example of the unique perspective feminist theory can bring to preexisting and gender-biased modes of thinking. Chodorow (1978) took Freudian theory's emphasis on women's problematic development and flipped it on its head, arguing that in some ways, women's psychological development is less fraught with difficulties than that of men. Both feminine and masculine personalities have their difficulties, but psychoanalytic theory reverses the tendency of Freudian theory to normalize masculinity while problematizing femininity. But by drawing on Freud and psychonanalysis as a model, psychoanalytic theory is subject to some of the same critiques. In psychoanalytic theory, most of the important events of gender socialization happen at a very early age, resulting in a relatively fixed gender identity by the time we are about two to three years of age. In addition, though psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the importance of social factors, namely the structure of the family, in its emphasis on unconscious processes that occur so early in our development, it can be seen as an essentialist theory in its implications. That is, psychoanalytic theory implies that because gender differences become deeply embedded in the structure of our personalities, they are part of our essential natures and difficult to change. Other critics point out the difficulty of verifying the assumptions and predictions of psychoanalytic theory using empirical research. How do you prove that an infant experiences no sense of separation between him or herself and his or her mother? How do you demonstrate the inherent instability of masculinity? Though some of the studies discussed attempt to demonstrate this in adults, proving the initial dynamics described in psychoanalytic theory is a difficult task.

> **?** How are gender schema theory and psychoanalytic theory, which are theories influenced by feminism, different from social learning theory and cognitive development theory, which were not developed with the influence of feminism? What questions do the latter two theories ask that seem consistent with what you've learned about feminism so far?

THE EARLY YEARS: PRIMARY SOCIALIZATION INTO GENDER

Now that we have a familiarity with some of the more important theories of how gender socialization *should* happen according to these theories, we can begin to explore accounts of how gender socialization actually *does* happen in a variety of different settings. We'll start at the beginning, with what sociologists call *primary socialization*. **Primary socialization** is simply the initial process of learning the ways of a society or group that occurs in infancy and childhood and is transmitted through the primary groups to which we belong. **Primary groups** are characterized by intimate, enduring, unspecialized relationships among small

groups who generally spend a great deal of time together (Cooley, 1909). This definition should sound like what most people understand a family to be, although other groups, such as childhood friends, can also make up a primary group. One way to think about a primary group is if you drew a ring of concentric circles around yourself that represented increasing levels of intimacy and importance to you in your life, the innermost circle would be your primary group. All the theories we have discussed deal with primary socialization, and this includes a focus on what happens very early in our lives in the specific environment of our families.

Primary socialization begins before a baby is even born because they are born into a society with certain assumptions about gender that existed long before they came along. Important to newborns' socialization is the relative value placed on either gender in society. In many societies around the world, more value is placed on male infants than on female infants (DeLoache & Gottlieb, 2000). In many cultures, the family name can only be carried on by sons because daughters take on their husband's name when they marry. Sons may be responsible for taking care of elderly parents or for rituals important to family and religious life. For example, in the Hindu religious tradition, important rituals surrounding the death of a parent should generally be carried out by a son, including proper preparation of the body for cremation. The reasons for this preference for boys vary, but it has important impacts on the gender socialization of boys and girls. The United Nations has estimated that female infants and children suffer higher rates of abuse and neglect in countries such as China, India, Papua New Guinea, and the Maldives because of the preference for male children (United Nations, 2000). Historically, in these countries, female infants survived at much lower rates than male infants because parents fed the girls less, sometimes left them exposed to the elements, and generally neglected their female children. In a moment, we'll explore some more subtle examples of gender socialization, but if you can imagine being a girl in one of these societies, what would be the end product of this type of gender socialization? Assuming you did survive as a girl, what kind of gender identity might you end up with?

? Does your culture show a preference for male infants? As technology develops that allows parents to influence the sex of their child, will parents demonstrate a preference for male or female children?

Boys are not seen as more desirable in every society across the globe. The Mukogodo people of Kenya place more value on female infants because of the importance of bride wealth that a girl child can bring to the family (Cronk, 1993). The hunting activities of male Mukogodo are also stigmatized in comparison to the farming activities of surrounding tribes. Because of the advantages female children bring to the family relative to male children, the Mukogodo women breastfeed their daughters longer and take them to receive medical care more often. There are also historical variations in the extent to which Americans valued girls and boys. In the rural 1800s United States, boys were seen as more valuable than girls because of their assumed ability to contribute to farm work. But in urban areas of the same time period, girls were seen as more valuable because they could

work in factory jobs and contribute to the family's income (Coltrane, 1998). In cultures like these two, the experience of gender socialization for girls would be very different from the experience of girls in places like China and India. This is the first point for us to realize about gender socialization. The way gender socialization takes place and the particular form of gender that children learn is deeply related to the type of culture in which they find themselves. The relative value placed on boys and girls is just one piece of that picture. As psychoanalytic theory indicates, the structure of family life is also important to the form of gender socialization. Do children grow up in what has come to be seen as the typical model in the United States: the nuclear family consisting of Mom, Dad, and children? Or are they raised in a multigenerational family in urban India, with three generations of a family often living together in one apartment? Within that family structure, the way childcare and other duties are distributed is also important to the process of gender socialization. Who is primarily responsible for taking care of children in a society? How much importance is placed on the task of caring for children relative to other activities in the society? What other kinds of duties does the person primarily responsible for childcare have and how compatible are those other duties with the task of caring for a child? If we begin just with this basic set of questions that have to do with socialization that happens within family structures, it should already be obvious that the social context matters. Let's begin with the specific case of gender socialization in one setting to explore some of these questions about the social and cultural context of gender socialization.

The One-Child Policy and Gender in China

The family is an important source of primary socialization. The role of families is especially emphasized in social learning theory, which has been described as a top-down explanation of gender socialization. Literally, the ones on the top (the taller people) are primarily responsible for imparting gender to those on the bottom, the shorter humans we call *children*. From this top-down perspective, parents and other adults in a child's life matter a great deal for gender socialization. Adults take an active role in shaping the way children think about and internalize gender. Taking this top-down approach, the case of China and its one-child policy presents an interesting example of how parents and family structure can be important to the process of gender socialization.

As we discussed, Chinese culture has a long history of preference for male children over female children. Within a traditionally patrilineal and patrilocal system, daughters marry into their husbands' family and are responsible for the support of their in-laws in old age, rather than for their own parents (Tsui & Rich, 2002). Sons therefore become important to parents for the support they will provide to them in their old age, as well as for their ability to farm in rural areas. This meant that for much of Chinese history, as in many parts of the world, women were not educated at the same rates as men. Because of these parental priorities, part of the gender socialization experiences of boys in China would have been that education was for them, but not for their sisters. In this top-down model of socialization, the priorities of parents are instilled in the motivations and expectations of their boy and girl children.

Much of this changed during Communist rule in China, which began in 1949. Improving the status of women was among one of the goals of the Communist government in China,

and this included denouncing the more traditional ideas about gender that had existed up until this point. These goals were enforced through a gender-neutral, state-assigned employment system that helped to encourage more Chinese women to enter the workforce as well as to diminish the pay gap between women and men in China. This meant the government literally decided who was hired for various jobs rather than putting that power in the hands of the employers themselves. In addition, education was nearly free at the primary and secondary level, removing the cost barrier to parents educating their daughters. Prior to Communist rule, the gap between men's and women's levels of education was as high as 40% (83% of women as compared to 40% of men were illiterate in 1949). In 1990, among urban Chinese born under Communist rule, the average length of schooling for men was 10.4 years compared to 9.4 years for women, a considerable reduction in this inequality (Tsui & Rich, 2002). Ideologically, the Communist party instituted slogans such as "Women hold up half the sky" to encourage the cultural values of gender equality.

The social system of Communism in China is a fascinating example of what happens when a government seeks to very intentionally and radically alter preexisting values and patterns in a culture. Communist leaders in China wanted to reduce gender and class inequality, but the nation also faced the pressing problem of overpopulation. In Chapter 7, we'll discuss the gendered implications of government attempts to limit population growth, but in China, the main strategy for population control became the **one-child policy**. Under this government mandated system, which began in 1979, couples were limited to having only one child per family. This might seem rather extreme from your own cultural perspective, and especially so if you consider control over reproduction and the structure of families to be a basic human right. In addition, 20 years of Communist rule encouraging the ideals of gender equality have not been enough to completely erase centuries of male domination in China. Because many couples still value having sons over daughters, the one-child policy has led to sex-selective abortion and the abandonment of female infants (Tsui & Rich, 2002). Urban couples limited to having only one child find out the sex of the baby before it's born and abort female children, while in rural areas couples simply abandon female infants after they are born.

In their research, Ming Tsui and Lynne Rich (2002) pointed out that in addition to these negative consequences, the one child policy has also had an unintended positive consequence for girls born to one-child families in urban areas in China. They focus specifically on urban families in China, rather than focusing on the very different experiences of those in rural areas and smaller cities where educational and employment opportunities, as well as the extent to which the one-child policy is followed, are different. Their research on only-girl and only-boy families in Wuhan, the most populous city in central China, demonstrates that a variety of cultural, economic, and governmental factors come together to significantly reduce gender differences in the educational aspirations of boys and girls. Culturally, Confucianism as a strong philosophical tradition in China places a great deal of importance on education; teachers are highly revered in Chinese society in a way that they are not in Anglo-European societies like the United States. At the same time, economically many parents look to their children as a kind of future "welfare agency" for them as they age. Though the elderly were often well-provided for under Communism with pensions and old-age payments, more recent changes to the economy have made parents more nervous about how they will be provided for in their old age. Free-market economic

reforms have undermined pensions, while inflation and widespread layoffs have led to increasing distrust in the government's ability to provide for people in their old age. This means parents increasingly turn to their children as crucial to providing for their welfare when they can no longer work. These pressures, combined with the reality of the one-child policy, mean that urban families can no longer afford to encourage only their sons to pursue an education. This research in Wuhan demonstrates that an unintended consequence of the one-child policy is that it helped to promote education for girls in one-child families due to these pressures as well as to the absence of a brother or other siblings to compete with for support and encouragement.

Their analysis of survey results from 1,021 eighth grade boys and girls in Wuhan reveals no significant gender differences in a wide range of variables that deal with actual academic achievement as well as with the amount of resources invested in the education of boys and girls. There were no significant gender differences in mathematical scores between the boys and girls, despite what we've already learned about the tendency in many cultures for boys to be more encouraged to pursue and excel in math than girls. This demonstrates further support for the idea that this particular sex difference in mathematical ability is probably more cultural than biological. Girls and boys also did not differ in their educational aspirations for themselves. In addition, the expectations parents had for their children's education did not show any significant differences by the gender of the child for these one-child families, and parents of boys were no more likely to invest in their child's education than were the parents of girls. Tsui and Rich (2002) demonstrated that among this particular group of urban, one-child families, gender differences in educational expectations and performance seem to have been greatly reduced, if not to have disappeared altogether.

> **?** Thinking about your own family, how do you think the structure impacted your own gender socialization? Were there gender differences in how your parents treated you and siblings of a different gender? Were there more women or men in your family (including parents and other members of your household) and how did that affect your own gender socialization?

What does the case of the one-child policy in China teach us about gender socialization in general? First, the case of the one-child policy in China demonstrates how important the wider structure of society is to what we might be tempted to think of as a fairly intimate and personal process—learning how to become a gendered person. In this case, we see the overlap of many different factors in dictating the gender socialization experiences of boys and girls. There is first the backdrop of Chinese culture in general, with its historical preference for boys, as well as the Confucian view on the importance of education. But culture is never static, and Communist rule in China very intentionally sought to change aspects of this gender ideology. Gender socialization must take into account the dynamic nature of changing values in a given society. So in looking at the socialization of children in China, or in any context, it is important to avoid the temptation to talk about "Chinese culture" in general; in this study, Tsui and Rich (2002) examined Chinese culture in urban cities, among

one-child families, in the beginning of the 21st century, and all those specifics are important. In addition to cultural factors that impact socialization, there are also economic and governmental policies that reach all the way into the intimate realm of parents and children. The combination of an economic decision in the move toward a free-market economy along with the governmental one-child policy can both affect the dynamics of gender socialization in Chinese families. Thus, institutions can have an important impact at the interactional and individual level on the process of gender socialization. Programs and policies, like the one-child policy, can have unintended gender consequences.

This case also provides a specific situation through which to examine some of the theories we laid out at the beginning of the chapter. Applying social learning theory to this case helps to demonstrate its strengths and weaknesses as an approach. From a social learning perspective, the attitudes of parents toward girl and boy children matters very much in this top-down perspective. If parents believe the educational success of their daughters is just as important as the educational success of their sons, this will be reflected in the ways in which parents reward various behaviors and in how they think of various behaviors as sex-typed. One of the variables Tsui and Rich (2002) explored was whether children talked to their parents about school. You can imagine, through the lens of social learning theory, how parents who are equally invested in the educational success of their daughters and sons would respond to their child discussing school; they would respond enthusiastically to both girls and boys, serving as a reward for their daughter's or son's focus on their education. But if parents are more invested in the education of their sons, they might be indifferent to their daughter when she talks to them about school, sending her the message that education should not necessarily be seen as important for her. In social learning theory, parents become the conduits through which the predominant views of society flow into their children. On the other hand, remember that social learning theory did not have much to say about how certain behaviors come to be sex-typed, or about how the larger social structure is involved in the process of socialization. The socialization taking place in these Chinese families is impossible to understand without that larger context, and so this is one potential weakness of social learning theory to understanding gender socialization.

Doctors Teaching Gender: Intersex Socialization

The one-child policy in China demonstrates how cultural aspects of a particular society, such as a preference for male children, can have an effect on gender socialization. One particular aspect of cultural beliefs about gender in the Anglo-European world is our belief in sexual dimorphism, as discussed in Chapter 1. Intersexed children do not clearly fit into the established order of two sexes and two genders, and so their experience of gender socialization is influenced by one of Western society's most fundamental cultural beliefs—the existence of two sexes. What does gender socialization look like in the case of intersexed individuals who are made to fit into our preexisting sex and gender categories?

For many intersexed children, in addition to the important agents of socialization of parents, school, church, and the media, the medical community is added as an important element in how they learn about gender. In her interviews with 37 intersexed individuals, Sharon E. Preves (2003) discovered that the experience of repeated surgeries and medical examinations had important effects on the socialization of people who did not clearly fit

into existing sex categories. The gender socialization of intersexed individuals is supposed to proceed "normally" based on whatever sex is chosen for the children by the doctors. Leaving aside the question for now as to whether there is such a thing as normal gender socialization, parents and family are instructed to raise the child as a normal boy or girl and to hide the truth of her or his medical condition from the child. But for most of the individuals in Preves' sample, there was nothing normal about the repeated medical procedures to which these children were subjected; 95% of her sample underwent some kind of surgical intervention. These experiences taught intersexed children that there was something wrong with them, though they were never certain exactly what it was. Many came to see themselves as freakish or monstrous. What are especially interesting in Preves's study are the cases of the few individuals who did not undergo any surgical intervention at a young age. Surgery is prescribed by doctors to avoid the social stigma that they assume will result from having ambiguous genitalia as a child. But one of the few individuals who was born with ambiguous genitalia and did *not* undergo surgery described other children's reaction to seeing her/his naked body with the following description:

> It was at some point in my youth when I was playing doctor with other kids, or playing take off your clothes and show and tell, and realizing that I was different from anybody else there. And I also remember it wasn't a big deal at all. Everybody was like, "Wow! That's cool. Hey, you look like this, I look like this. Oh, yeah, cool, fine, whatever. And that wasn't really a big deal at all. (Preves, 2003, pp. 64–65)

In at least this case, the experience of having ambiguous genitalia was not at all stigmatizing to this individual as a child. According to Preves's (2003) study, the individuals who had experienced repeated surgeries and medical examinations often compared their experiences to sexual abuse, feeling that as children they were turned into a "freak show" or "dog and pony show" (p. 66) for doctors and other medical professionals. One individual who had been raised as a female was told by a doctor that her ovaries (which were actually undeveloped testes) had to be removed because they were precancerous and, if they were not removed, she would develop cancer very soon. She spent much of her childhood worrying about dying from cancer. Another individual was told that if she stopped taking her medicine (hormone pills to prevent the development of secondary sex characteristics), she would die. In general, Preves's research demonstrates that the psychological damage done to these individuals' sense of self might far outweigh any of the possible negative experiences of living with the bodies into which they are born, without the intervention of surgery.

The extent to which doctors are involved as agents of gender socialization in the lives of intersexed children is demonstrated by two experiences Preves (2003) identified among individuals in her study. First, doctors' examinations of intersexed children involved repeatedly putting the genitals or naked bodies of these children on display. This included photographs that were taken for journal articles, books, or other medical publications. One intersexed individual tells a story about being hospitalized for one of her surgeries; she began counting the number of people who were paraded through her room to examine her and her genitals, but stopped when she had reached over one hundred. In addition, as part of the physical examinations, doctors sometimes stimulated genitals (through physical

contact) in order to test for responsiveness. These experiences had long-term effects on how these individuals thought about themselves, their bodies, and their sexuality.

The second way in which doctors served as agents of socialization was in the way they often counseled intersexed individuals about their intimate relationships. As we already mentioned in this chapter, one measure of success for sex reassignment for intersexed individuals is that they achieve normal gender identity, and that often includes the achievement of heterosexuality. This is because an important component of feminine gender identity is a woman who is sexually, emotionally, and psychologically attracted to men. Doctors are therefore somewhat invested in the intimate relationships of intersexed patients. In Preves's (2003) interviews, individuals told how doctors coached them with stories to provide to intimate partners to explain their conditions in ways that sought to conceal the truth of their intersexed status. For example, one doctor provided his patient with an alternative medical condition to use as an explanation for her short vagina, a condition that was not due to intersexuality. Another doctor advised his patient, when she started dating, to simply bring her boyfriend in to talk to him rather than trying to explain her condition or be honest with him about her intersexed status.

Preves (2003) compared the experiences of her research subjects to that of many within the homosexual community and to the important experience of coming out. Like those within the contemporary gay and lesbian community, many intersexual individuals are increasingly coming out of the closet about their identities. This is due to the increased visibility of intersexuality through groups like the Intersexed Society of North America. Many of the individuals in Preves's interviews experienced a sense of relief from the anxiety caused by their repeated encounters with the medical community and the air of secrecy about their situation only when they finally found out what was really "wrong" with them. At least for the individuals in Preves's study, finding out about the true nature of their intersexuality was not, as doctors assumed, a traumatic event.

When many of the individuals in Preves's (2003) study discovered their identity as intersexed, they faced questions about whether or how to share this information with others in their lives. Some individuals described their experiences in terms of trying to pass as someone of one gender or another because they know their true biological sex does not line up with either gender in expected ways. One intersexed individual described this experience of passing in the following way: "I was trying really hard to act like I thought men acted, so I watched my voice very carefully and I watched my mannerisms, and I would observe how men were" (as quoted in Preves, 2003, p. 83). Some developed stories to explain certain features of their intersexed status, like scars from past surgeries or their inability to have children. Preves argued that, in various forms, these individuals searched for some external validation of their gender status, and they pursued a variety of strategies towards this end. One intersexed individual described her wedding day as important to this overall task of feeling fully and normally gendered as a woman:

> When I got married was when I really felt so feminine with my bride's dress, my wedding dress, and a veil. I felt so pretty. I was so proud. That was a turning point and that was about the most significant time in my life that was special to me, where I felt like totally female, totally womanly. (Preves, 2003, p. 85)

The same individual goes on to describe how her husband now helps her to feel feminine through his love and sexual attraction, in addition to making her feel physically small compared to his large size.

Why are the experiences of these individuals important to our general understanding of gender socialization? Can we say that if there is such a thing as normal or typical gender socialization, the experience of intersexed individuals has nothing in common with that norm? Assuming that you yourself are not intersexed, was there anything about the experiences of this group of people that sounded familiar to your own experience of gender socialization? Or does the experience of this group of people seem so foreign to your own experiences with gender and socialization as to be completely unrecognizable? The intersexed are important to the question of nature versus nurture. In theory, their stories could show us what socialization might be like in the absence of sex. But as we have seen, this is not what happens in the Anglo-European world with intersexuality. Biological sex is medically imposed on these individuals. What we learn from Preves's (2003) study is the damaging effects of this particular framework for dealing with intersexed individuals.

But take a step back and think about what intersexed individuals learn from their interaction with doctors and the medical establishment. The lesson they are being taught, even though they may not become aware of it until later, is that to be born without an obvious sex is both a dark and terrifying secret and a fascinating medical and biological phenomenon. The experiences of these individuals teach us that, at least in Anglo-European society, intersexuality is both fascinating and terrifying. When doctors encourage a culture of secrecy and lies, lying to parents of the intersexed and to the intersexed children themselves, and eventually encouraging the intersexed themselves to lie, they are patrolling society's entrenched beliefs in the existence of sex and gender. What is so dangerous about knowledge of intersexuality? The experiences of these children teach us that part of the context within which socialization occurs in many cultures is a rigid sex/gender system that needs to be protected from any individuals, like the intersexed, who disturb its smooth operation. This is why the truth of intersexuality is so frightening; it calls into questions too many of the basic assumptions of this particular society.

Once intersexed individuals find out about their status as intersexed, they may feel like they are attempting to pass as a true gender. Here's how one intersexual individual in Preves's (2003) study described this feeling: "I think you are constantly monitoring yourself. Is this the way women act? Is this what women think? Is this how women are? It's maybe not something that you do consciously, but it's a constant kind of trying to fit in" (as quoted in Preves, 2003, p. 82). This description might sound familiar thinking back to our discussion of the doing gender perspective. Remember, according to this point of view, all of us are passing as a gender through making our actions accountable to others as gendered. You might argue from this perspective that the experiences of intersexed individuals and the ways in which they experience gender socialization are different only because their unique position makes them more aware of gender as a performance, as an attempt to pass as a woman or a man. A few intersexed individuals Preves interviewed came to describe their experience of gender as being like the performance of drag, or performing a series of roles that don't reflect any underlying reality. As one intersexed individual described, "And in this society, all I really do is drag. I do the execu-dyke drag, I do girl drag, I do boy drag. This is girl drag, what I'm wearing today" (as quoted in Preves, 2003, p. 86). The doing gender

perspective would argue that what we have in common with intersexed children is that socialization merely teaches us this ability to perform. Though intersexed individuals may be more aware of this performative nature of gender, all of us are to some extent doing drag.

> **?** Can you think of moments you have experienced that are similar to those described by some of these intersexed individuals, when you questioned whether your actions or thoughts were consistent with your sex category and gender? Have you ever thought to yourself, "Is this what women do?" or "Is this what men do?" and been uncertain about whether your own behavior fit within expectations about your gender?

Research on adolescents who are not intersexed reveals similar dynamics, especially for girls as they go through puberty. Girls experiencing their first menstrual period, developing breast and pubic hair, all wonder about whether their experiences and their bodies are, in fact, normal (Martin, 1996). Though intersexed individuals are an extreme case of these concerns, their stories teach us that all of us are plagued by concerns about our normality. We worry about our normality in terms of our biological sex, our performance of gender, the direction of our desires and attractions (toward the same sex, opposite sex, or some combination of both), and a thousand other gender-related aspects of our lives. Queer theorists might argue that the categories of sex, gender, and sexual orientation make all of us at one time or another feel like a freak or a monster. This is not to say all of us suffer in quite the same way or to the same degree as intersexed children. But queer theorists would point out that gender makes freaks of us all, and so we have much more in common with intersexed people than you might at first expect. Queer theory as a perspective suggests that the experiences of the intersexed merely help them become more aware of these connections that all of us have experienced at one time or another.

Gender Camp: The Importance of Peer Groups

When I ask students in my classes to write personal accounts of their own gender socialization, they usually focus on stories about how their parents or other adults encouraged or discouraged them to engage in various activities. There's usually at least one story about how a sibling of the other gender was treated differently—a brother allowed to stay out later than a sister or a sister being scolded less harshly than a brother. There's almost always some discussion of toys, Barbie versus Power Rangers, and memories of rooms being painted pink or blue. Sometimes there's a particularly traumatic story about a time when someone misidentified their gender and thought they were a boy when they were really a girl or vice versa. There's usually not a lot of focus on the next aspect of socialization we'll discuss: the importance of peer groups to gender socialization. Maybe this is an indication of the intuitive appeal of social learning theory, with its emphasis on the family and adults in general in the process of socialization. But if you remember from Chapter 2,

social network theory draws our attention to the important, though small, initial differences in the play groups of girls and boys. Boys with their larger play groups come to share a whole set of information that is completely different from what girls are talking about in their own smaller groups. These differences set the basis for the gradual accumulation of gender differences over the course of our lives.

The shift in psychology and sociology from a social learning model to a cognitive model led many researchers to begin to study the peer groups of children in childhood and how interaction among children is important to the process of gender socialization. This follows from the shift to cognitive development and later gender schema theory because the focus shifts from what parents and other adults do to children's active role in their own socialization. Cognitive development and gender schema theories are more of a bottom-up approach to socialization, emphasizing the active role of children themselves in their socialization. If this is the focus, it makes sense to study children in the types of settings where they get to exercise more control over their environments. Where do children have more independence and control? In play groups made up of their own peers and characterized by less adult supervision. Barrie Thorne's (1993) ethnography of girls and boys in their early school years (kindergarten through fifth grade) was one of the first studies in this area, and she found that gender is important to the organization of play among young children at school. On the playgrounds of the two working class American schools that Thorne observed, girls and boys are often involved in gender-segregated activities; girls played games that took up less space, like jumping rope, doing tricks on the monkey bars, or four-square, while boys ranged over wider areas of space and tended to play competitive sports like soccer, basketball, or football. Thorne also brought attention to the moments when play and interaction were not gender segregated; boys and girls interacted across genders in several different ways, sometimes reaffirming gender boundaries (through games of pollution, like "cooties") and enacting heterosexuality (using taunts like "Jimmy likes Betty" or "Betty likes Jimmy"). But Thorne also found certain situations in which gender as an organizing category becomes relatively less important. One example was when children were engaged in a particularly absorbing project that required cooperation, like a group art project or organizing a radio show. Thorne's research overall drew attention to the ways in which children engaged in behavior that often reinforced traditional gender ideas, but sometimes challenged or ignored those ideas as well. In other words, children are active shapers of gender socialization rather than passive recipients, and they do not simply absorb gender as it is channeled through their parents and other adults.

Since Thorne's (2003) ethnography, a variety of research in different settings has been conducted on the importance of peer group interaction to gender socialization. In one example of such a study, McGuffey and Rich (1999) examined how children negotiated gender within the context of a diverse day camp for children between the ages of 5 and 12. These researchers used the concept of hegemonic masculinity to explore how girls and boys patrol notions of what it means to be masculine and feminine, focusing on behaviors that occur in what they call the **gender transgression zone**. The gender transgression zone is not literally one physical space, but rather any activities or behaviors that have the potential to be seen as violating gender norms in some way. The gender transgression zone is the social space between gender-typed behaviors, or between what's seen as appropriate for boys and appropriate for girls. McGuffey and Rich were interested in exactly what happens when boys or girls at this particular day camp entered this zone.

McGuffey and Rich (1999) found that even at that relatively young age, gender inequality and the power of hegemonic masculinity were reflected in the micro-politics of the setting. **Hegemonic masculinity** is a concept that comes from R. W. Connell's (1995/2005) exploration of how our dominant ideas about what it means to be a man influence the behaviors of actual men in any given society. According to Connell's theory, there is no one male role, as might be assumed in sex-role theory, but rather a variety of masculinities that interact with each other in hierarchical and contested ways. Men enact different versions of this masculinity depending on where they are located in social hierarchies of power. Hegemonic masculinity is the type of gender practice that, in any given space and time, exists at the top of those hierarchies. It is important in Connell's formulation to keep in mind that there is not one dominant way of being masculine, but only masculinities—of which hegemonic masculinity is but one example. In addition, the particular version of masculinity that is hegemonic changes across times, cultures, and subcultures. The masculinity that is seen as hegemonic in the summer day camp that forms McGuffey and Rich's (1999) research setting is not necessarily hegemonic for adults, for American men 50 years ago, for Mexican men, or even for the boys at another summer day camp down the road. But once a particular version of masculinity becomes hegemonic, it can be used to patrol the behaviors of men, or boys, within that particular setting.

The social world of both girls and boys at this day camp was stratified within each gender. Within the boy's group, being high status was associated with athletic ability, as well as with general attitudes of detachment, competitiveness, and attention-drawing behavior. These qualities then made up the content of hegemonic masculinity in this particular setting. Girls lacked the existence of one standard hierarchy that applied across all girls; each small group of girls might have one or two high-status girls, but there was more flexibility about what determined status among the girls. Between the two genders, the status of boys seemed to generally outrank that of girls, and this was demonstrated in the power boys had to patrol both other boys *and* girls in the gender transgression zone.

Boys entered the gender transgression zone when they did not conform to the established requirements of masculinity as defined by this particular group of boys. For example, one boy, Phillip, was marginalized by the other boys because of his small stature, lack of coordination, feminine appearance (shoulder-length hair), and preference for stereotypically feminine activities like jump rope. Phillip was treated as a social pariah by the other boys, called a faggot, fag, or gay, and excluded from all boy activities and boy social circles. Phillip got along fine with girls, but the researchers tell a story in which one boy refused to be paired with Phillip in a game even under the threat of being forced to sit out the whole summer camp; the other boy declared, "I don't care if I have to sit out the whole summer 'cause I'm not going to let that faggot touch me" (McGuffey & Rich, 1999, p. 619). This rejection of Phillip is a way in which boys patrolled the gender transgression zone, demonstrating what happens when you do not follow the norms dictated by hegemonic masculinity as it is defined for this group. Boys also used Phillip to warn other boys if their behaviors became too dangerously outside the bounds of normalcy, using the threat of associating them with Phillip. None of the boys wanted to act like Phillip, and the previous story shows how strongly they felt about touching Phillip, let alone interacting with him.

Boys also patrolled girls in the gender transgression zone. This was important to the preservation of hegemonic masculinity because if too many girls could make claims to

masculinity, masculinity would begin to lose its meaning as something exclusively within the male domain. Girls who entered the boys' sphere were either marginalized or masculinized by being adopted into their particular boy culture. Within this particular day camp, several African American girls were actually better athletes than some of the boys—recall that athletic ability was crucial to boys' status in this setting. The athletic ability of these girls clearly represented a kind of gender transgression, especially as these girls still also participated in many feminine behaviors. When boys were asked why they did not associate with these African American girls, their explanations centered on these girls' "weirdness" and differentness. Hegemonic masculinity was maintained by describing the girls who actually fit some of its requirements (like athletic ability) as weird or abnormal; marginalizing girls in this way preserved the idea that athletic ability was really a masculine trait in the end, despite the contradiction that some girls also seemed to possess this trait.

At least one girl in the research setting was included in the boys' activities and treated to some degree as an honorary boy. Patricia was very athletic and could outperform the boys in the important game of basketball. One day when the boys created an obstacle course that they claimed would test their manhood, Patricia was able to complete the manhood tasks better and faster than many of the boys. The boys proclaimed Patricia a man, and she was by and large accepted into the boys group. Patricia also had the added benefit of demonstrating an appropriately masculine level of detachment when she was interacting with the boys. When asked why Patricia was accepted among the boys, one boy answered, "Well, Patricia is not really a girl. Technically she is, but not really. I mean, come on, she acts like a boy most of the time. She even passed the 'manhood' test, remember" (McGuffey & Rich, 1999, p. 620)? The researchers argued that girls like Patricia who ventured into the gender transgression zone by demonstrating masculine behaviors could join the boys' group, but only by giving up their femininity. The boys allowed Patricia to join them not as a girl, but only because she was not *really* a girl. To allow Patricia to join while retaining her femininity would have jeopardized the idea of hegemonic masculinity by giving girls access to it. Girls like Patricia became degendered, and this maintained how masculinity in this day camp dictated not just how the boys behaved, but how the girls defined femininity as well. Boys in this setting maintained hegemonic masculinity both by controlling the behaviors of other boys and by dictating the behaviors of girls.

What about girls and how they patrolled each other, as well as boys who entered the gender transgression zone? This research demonstrated that girls had less power to do this kind of patrolling than the boys because of their smaller cliques. This should sound familiar from our discussion of social network theory in Chapter 2. Remember that girls generally tend to have smaller networks as children. A high status girl in one of these small cliques could certainly patrol femininity within her own small group, but she had less power to control femininity among *all* the girls at the day camp in the way boys did. When a girl entered the gender transgression zone by intruding on boys' turf, other girls were more likely to band together as a large group to support her than they were to punish or discourage her behavior. For example, girls rallied around Corisa, who was able to beat Travis at Connect Four, after he had been bragging about how easy it was for him to beat girls in general. The other girls at this day camp were so proud of Corisa that one girl introduced her to her mother that day in the following way: "Mommy, this is Corisa. She beats boys in Connect Four" (McGuffey & Rich, 1999, p. 622). When a group of girls was asked

about the behavior of Patricia, the honorary man, they merely noted that she liked different stuff, but was still "nice." Girls transgressing femininity did not seem to be the same kind of violation for girls as gender transgression was for boys. But girls also did not perceive boys who transgressed gender behavior in the same way as other boys. Girls were generally accepting of transgressive boys such as Phillip, asking only that they adhere to feminine norms of niceness, such as sharing candy with friends.

> **?** When you think back to your own experiences at school or camp, are they similar to those described by Thorne (2003) or McGuffey and Rich (1999)? How are they different? How might you explain those differences?

There are two interesting and interconnected questions raised by McGuffey and Rich's (1999) research. The first is, What are these children learning and teaching themselves about the structure of gender in general? With hegemonic masculinity, remember that no one really completely conforms to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, but that it's a kind of yard stick against which men are forced to measure themselves. McGuffey and Rich argued that this was a large part of what this particular group of boys was learning through their interactions at the day camp. Through the example of boys like Phillip and through the way girls were largely excluded from their play groups, boys learned the content of hegemonic masculinity. Equally as important, they learned the consequences for violating those norms of hegemonic masculinity. They also learned that masculinity carries power—the power to regulate both the behavior of other boys as well as the behavior of girls. One particular example of this power came when a high-status boy was able to use his power to actually change the content of the gender transgression zone. Adam, the highest ranked boy in the group, learned how to do a hand-clapping routine one afternoon while he was waiting for his parents to pick him up from the camp. These routines were clearly feminine activities because only girls engaged in them, and so learning hand-clapping routines was a clear example of gender transgression. Adam was able to transgress because of his high status among the boys. Though boys were initially puzzled when they saw Adam engaging in this feminine behavior, they eventually followed his lead, and soon girls and boys were interacting in what had previously been defined as a girls-only activity. This incident demonstrated that boys in this particular setting had the power not just to patrol the borders of gender, but also to alter and shift those boundaries. We can argue, then, that an important lesson these children learned was about gender inequality—that boys have access to power to control social interaction in ways that girls do not.

The second question raised by McGuffey and Rich's (1999) research has to do with how the case of these children serves as an example of the importance of peer groups to gender socialization. Note that there is no mention of parents, teachers, camp counselors, or other adults in this account of gender socialization at day camp. This is not to say that adults were not present on a daily basis in the day camp, including the researchers themselves asking children questions about their interactions. But though gender is clearly important to the

interactions at day camp, what is absent is any sense in which children are being rewarded or not rewarded by adults for various gendered behaviors. Boys appeared to be motivated to act in ways consistent with the particular form of hegemonic masculinity due to their real fears of what would happen to them if they did not conform to this norm. Where does the boys' clear sense of the boundaries of what is appropriate and inappropriate for them as masculine come from? Bem (1983, 1993) might argue the patrolling done by boys at this day camp is clear evidence of gender schema they have come to internalize. These boys have learned to see the world through the specific gender lenses provided by their society. Gender schema theory would point out the ways in which the content of gender socialization in this day camp conformed to the characteristics of gender polarization and androcentrism. The boys had a clear sense that there were some behaviors (hand clapping) that were appropriate for girls but not for boys. The way in which they responded to boys who exhibited any "feminine" behaviors, like Phillip, demonstrated androcentrism; Phillip lowered his status by engaging in feminine behaviors because feminine behaviors were clearly seen as inferior to masculine ones. This was not the case for girls because they seemed to have no problem with boys engaging in feminine behavior. From the perspective of gender schema theory, we can see clear examples of children socializing themselves through the mechanism of gender schema, or the gendered ways in which they see the world.

If you were paying careful attention, though, you might have noticed that the behavior of the children in the day camp did not always perfectly conform to the content of gender schema as described by Bem (1983, 1993) and others. Though hand-clapping was at first seen as clearly OK for girls but not for boys, the story of Adam shows how this group of children transformed that norm. In this particular day camp, a high status boy was able to undo the gender polarization of that particular activity. In addition, Adam's adoption of hand clapping somewhat altered the structure of hegemonic masculinity, even though the researchers also found that boys eventually masculinized hand clapping by changing lyrics in not-so-subtle ways (from the girls original, "All the birdies on J-Bird Street like to hear the robin go tweet, tweet, tweet," to the boys adaptation, "All the birdies on J-Bird Street like to hear robin say eat my meat" (p. 624). What does this tell us about the process of gender socialization? It is not a simple process of transmission or re-creation of predetermined, and therefore unchanging, gender norms and ideology. The exact gender polarization of activities can change in somewhat spontaneous ways, largely dictated by the culture of children's peer groups. The content of gender children learn is not static and set in stone but is in a process of change and adaptation, much of which is the result of children's own creativity. In other words, from a bottom-up approach, children have the ability to alter the exact content of gender socialization in interesting ways.

This is true of socialization as considered from the top-down approach as well. In social learning theory, parents and other adults have the power to alter the content of gender they teach to children. In McGuffey and Rich's (1999) research, Adam was motivated to learn hand clapping in part because he saw the male researcher engaging in hand-clapping activities with the girls. Adam's high status was also important, but the role of the adult researcher shows how the behavior of adults can also lead to an alteration of gender norms. This research helps us to see that gender socialization is probably the result of complex interactions between adults, family structure, and the control children themselves exhibit over the ways in which they learn gender. Though it is useful to understand the unique

perspective of each of the four theories we have discussed, it is also useful to see the ways in which they can work together to explain the process of gender socialization.

LEARNING GENDER NEVER ENDS: SECONDARY SOCIALIZATION

Up until this point, we have dealt mainly with primary socialization—the ways in which we initially learn gender from those close primary groups such as family and childhood friends. For many of us, the first years of our lives very much revolved around these primary groups. And throughout our lives, though our primary groups may have changed (as we formed our own families in a multitude of different ways), these collections of people remain important sources of gender socialization. However, for many of us, the process of growing up involved increasing contact with secondary groups and therefore moved us into the realm of secondary socialization. **Secondary groups** are generally larger, more temporary, more impersonal, and more specialized than primary groups. They tend to be more specialized in that they focus on one or two primary goals, rather than on the unspecialized set of goals (if they can even be called that) which characterize a family as a group. On the other hand, a business organization as a secondary group has a definite purpose: to make money. A college class is another good example of a secondary group. Every time we join a group, we need to learn the norms and rules of that particular collection of individuals or of that institution. So **secondary socialization** is the learning process that takes place each time we join one of these new secondary groups. In our discussion of work in Chapter 9, we will explore the ways in which women and men become socialized into various occupations and the important implications this has for inequality. Unless you're a real hermit, hiding out in the woods somewhere and intentionally avoiding people, you continue to join new secondary, as well as primary, groups throughout your life. These groups may have their own ideas about gender and may subtly or not so subtly affect the way in which you think about gender. Because of this, the process of gender socialization is by no means fixed at a certain age; it changes greatly throughout the course of a person's life.

Learning to Be American: Socialization Through Immigration

We've already begun to see that the range of agents of socialization that help us learn gender are varied and extensive. There are many possible sources for our knowledge about how to be gendered, including parents, doctors, and other children. The experiences of immigrants and their children adapting to the culture of a new country serves as a good example of how socialization extends beyond childhood and how institutions as large as nations themselves can serve as agents of gender socialization. It may seem strange at first to think about nations as a source of knowledge for how to be gendered. But if you have traveled to other countries or even seen foreign movies or TV shows, you might have noticed some obvious differences in how gender works in other places. In France, men kiss each other without casting any doubts on their sexuality and women grow their armpit hair while still being seen as feminine. In Scotland and India, men wear skirts, while in some nations in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, Muslim women wear veils. These are some of the obvious cultural differences that demonstrate how your experience of gender might

vary depending on the country in which you were born. When people move from one country to another, both these obvious differences and more subtle ones become important in negotiating how to adapt to life in a new country.

Lubna Chaudhry (2006) documented how four young Pakistani Muslim women in the United States created hybrid identities as they learned how to become at least partial members of the very large secondary group of people called Americans. Having grown up in Pakistan, these young women were socialized in the particular gender norms of Pakistani and Islamic culture. In the United States, they were faced with a new set of gender norms that often existed in opposition to those enforced by their parents and other Pakistani Muslim immigrants. Chaudhry demonstrated through the lives of these four women how they were subtly shaped by their encounters with American culture and their decisions about how to do gender in their new country. Nida came from a background of family wealth in Pakistan and the United States, where her father owned a prosperous business. When she transferred to American schools from Pakistan, Nida's teachers encouraged her to pursue an advanced degree, reflecting an American gender norm regarding women and education. However, the gender norms of her particular family's clan background dictated that women marry as early as possible after the onset of puberty. Nida reconciled these conflicting values by marrying early and having a baby at 18, but also continuing to pursue her educational goals, with the support of her husband and her own family. In this sense, Nida chose to adapt to American values, which emphasized the importance of education and upward mobility largely regardless of gender. Her overextended schedule in college as student, wife, and mother was not enjoyable, but she saw it as reflecting part of what it meant to be an American woman. But by marrying and having a child at such a young age by American standards, Nida also chose to uphold the gender norms of her particular Pakistani culture. In this sense, Nida carefully negotiated the boundaries between American and Pakistani identity.

In her study of Filipina women in the United States, Yen Le Espiritu (2005) identified a similar dynamic. From the perspective of immigrants from the Philippines in the United States, family is more important to Filipinos than it is to many white Americans. One Filipino immigrant described it as follow:

> Our [Filipino] culture is different. We are more close-knit. We tend to help one another. Americans, ya know, they are all right, but they don't help each other that much. As a matter of fact, if the parents are old, they take them to a convalescent home and let them rot there. We would never do that in our culture. We would nurse them; we would help them until the end. (p. 234)

According to Espiritu (2005), within this framework, women are seen as especially important to upholding the importance of family in Filipino culture. The responsibility of Filipino men lies largely in marrying a Filipina woman. But Filipina women who try to pursue education, jobs, and upward mobility for themselves sometimes feel inhibited by the gender norms placed upon them by Filipino culture. One Filipina wife and mother explained these conflicting gender norms through her experience returning to school to pursue a doctoral degree in nursing:

The Filipinos, we are very collective, very connected. Going through the doctoral program, sometimes I think it is better just to forget about my relatives and just concentrate on school. All that connectedness, it steals parts of myself because all of my energies are devoted to my family. And that is the reason why I think Americans are successful. The majority of American people they can do what they want. They don't feel guilty because they only have a few people to relate to. For us Filipinos, it's like roots under the tree. You have all these connections. The Americans are more like the trunk. I am still trying to go up to the trunk of the tree but it is too hard. I want to be more independent, more like the Americans. (pp. 235–236)

Like Nida, this Filipina woman struggled with trying to achieve the goals set out by American culture for women—independence and success—while still retaining her ties to her Filipino family and community. The gender norms prescribed by Filipino culture made achieving the gender norms set out by American culture more difficult.

The cases of Pakistani Muslim and Filipina women demonstrate how secondary socialization can have important impacts on the way in which we experience gender. Nida's immigration to the United States exposed her to new secondary groups in her schools, including her teachers and female classmates. Learning American gender norms and values transformed the way she thought about what it meant to be a woman. The Filipina women were similarly exposed to the more individualistic values of American women and found themselves feeling torn between family obligations and their own desire for independence. Immigrating to a country means joining a whole host of new secondary groups while, in the case of these women, maintaining primary groups in the form of families. Their experiences demonstrated the complexity of socialization, in that often we receive messages about how to be gendered from many different sources, and those messages often contradict each other. Not all of us may have had the particular experience of immigrating to a new country, but all of us have joined new groups at some point in our lives and found ourselves negotiating the new set of norms, some of them related to gender. As suggested by both cognitive development theory and Bem's (1983, 1993) gender schema theory, women like Nida have some ability to socialize themselves by picking and choosing which of the gender norms of their new culture they will follow and which gender norms from their country of origin they will retain. The case of Pakistani Muslim and Filipina immigrants demonstrates that socialization is a process that we actively shape throughout our lifetimes as we join new groups.

?   Can you think of an experience when you joined a new group and had to adapt to a new set of norms? Were there specific norms related to gender that were different in your new group? How did you negotiate these new gender norms?

WHAT HAPPENS TO GENDER AS WE AGE?

We have already begun to explore the ways in which gender is never really a free-floating concept that exists without being attached to a multitude of other identities and cultural and historical contexts. There is no normal experience of what it means to be gendered, but only many multiple and often contradictory ways of experiencing this particular social category. To explore how this is true as it relates to gender socialization, think about an older person you know, perhaps a grandfather, grandmother, or other older relative. Do you think of this person as gendered? Is gender an important part of the way in which you perceive this person? Do you think gender is an important part of his or her life? Is gender more or less important in her or his life than it is in your own? If you were to make a list of some of the general characteristics of what makes someone feminine or masculine, how many would this older person correctly fit? These questions helps us begin to think about the ways in which gender changes as we age and how what it means to be a woman or a man, masculine or feminine, is very different at age 10, age 30, age 50, and age 70.

Focusing on how gender changes over the course of our lives, the period we call early adulthood is characterized for many women and men by the three activities of "partnering, parenting and making a living" (Galliano, 2003, p. 105). The concept of social roles tells us that at this point, many people step into what are some of the most central and most gendered social roles in many societies: worker, wife and husband, father and mother. Certainly, not all people sign up for these particular roles, and the content of the particular social roles varies a great deal across societies and historical periods. The expectations for many mothers in preindustrial France were that they immediately send their newborns to the country to be wet-nursed (breastfed and cared for by another woman who was paid for her services) for the first two or three years of life, while they went on working or pursuing their own interests (Lorber, 1994). It would have been considered strange to *not* send your newborn away, though the idea of not even seeing your child for the first two or three years of her or his life seems strange to many of us today. Though the exact expectations for what it means to be mother or father or wife or husband change over time, place, and culture, in most societies these are important roles that can take up relatively large or smaller chunks of people's lives. In some societies, women and men enter into the roles of married people and parents at much earlier ages, while in some societies, like the United States, the possible age at which people become parents is pushed farther back, especially for women. The role of worker takes many different forms globally, including paid labor in the formal economy, agricultural labor to support a family, or caring for children and a household. Given the predominance of the institutions of family and work, these two concerns are central to the understanding of how gender operates during the period of our lives called adulthood, and we'll look at these two institutions in more depth in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9. Keep in mind that institutions can be important agents of socialization, and part of what we'll explore later is how the family and work continue this lifelong process of gender socialization.

For now, regardless of the length or particular content of this adult period in a person's life, there remains the question as to what happens when these roles fade or disappear. And what happens when new roles emerge to take their place? As many parents will tell you, you never really stop being a father or a mother. Many demographers argue that this is especially true in many parts of the global North where the period during which children

are financially dependent on their parents has grown increasingly longer. For some parents in the United States with 30 year old children still living at home, that you never stop being a mother or father seems especially and perhaps painfully true. But even in places like India, where some mothers send their daughters away to live with their husband's family and may have little contact with them afterward, occupying the social role of mother does not end there. What *does* change for many people is the nature of the role of father or mother, partly through generally consuming much less time, effort, and energy as children move away or become more self-sufficient. The roles of father and mother change, while the roles of wife and husband can come to an end with the death of a spouse. This is especially true for married women, who are much more likely to end up as widows than their married male counterparts due to a combination of factors, including women's longer average life expectancy around the world and the tendency for women to marry older men.

Aging can also bring an end to the social role of worker in its many forms, although there are variations in how this social role intersects with age, as well. The concept familiar to many in the developed world of retirement is a fairly recent and isolated phenomenon. The idea that paid workers should be able to stop working and be provided for economically in their old age is an invention of the 20th century, and for most of those hundred years, it dealt primarily with the work experiences of men. With increasing longevity and quality of life at advanced ages, the retirement age is being pushed farther and farther back in many parts of the global North; but growing old often means a shift in the set of social roles that come along with work, whatever form that work may have taken. The idea of retirement is still a relatively foreign concept in many other parts of the world: In the mountains of Peru, there are expectations that individuals do hard physical labor well into their eighties. In some other cultures, the elderly are provided for through institutions beyond the government or the economy; in some Navajo tribes, the elderly are allowed to pick a grandchild to move in with and that grandchild then takes care of their daily chores (Cruikshank, 2003). Whatever particular form it may take, for many but not all people across the world, aging also signals a shift in the important role of worker.

Exactly what do these shifts in many of the most central social roles we occupy in adulthood look like as men and women age? In the past, and perhaps for many still today, there exists a belief that old age brings with it a process of androgenization, or a kind of gender crossover. To be androgynous is to possess both feminine and masculine characteristics, so the process of **androgenization** means adopting some of the qualities of the opposite gender. The basic idea, which worked its way into popular culture during the 1980s and 1990s, is that while women become bolder and more aggressive as they age, men become kinder and gentler (Gutman, 1987). The actual empirical truth of these assumptions is difficult to verify because during the same time period when much of the research took place, important changes were occurring in the gender roles of women and men in general. Examining attitudes among older men and women involves sorting out differences that are due to their particular position in the life cycle as opposed to due to generational or cohort differences. In other words, which characteristics are due specifically to being elderly and which characteristics are due to the unique historical experiences of particular generations of people (for example, the unique experiences of "Great Generation" in the United States and Europe who survived the Depression and World War II). Subsequent research seems to indicate that the important factor is not age in and of itself, but important events that come

with aging, such as having fewer parenting responsibilities or achieving high levels of occupational success (Carlson & Videka-Sherman, 1990). In addition, other identities besides gender can be crucial to understanding the operation of gender in later life; a cross-national study found that middle-class women did experience an increase in perceived power as they aged, but lower-class women did not (Friedman & Pines, 1992; Friedman & Todd, 1998). These middle-class women become more "androgynous" because the extra status of age and affluence made it less necessary for them to appear meek or less powerful (qualities often associated with femininity) in public. Because of the many variations in the experiences of aging globally, it is difficult to make many generalizations about the exact impact on gender of growing older.

Playing Old Maid: The Gender of Widowhood

As a small child, you might have played a card game called Old Maid. You might have even come across a special deck of cards designed specifically for the game of Old Maid. These special decks usually had at least one card with at least one visual depiction of what an Old Maid looked like. The basic form of this game is played in many places around the world, but in the United States it goes under this specific name, and the images on these cards tell us a great deal about our expectations for women who reach a certain age in life without having been married. The Old Maid is generally depicted surrounded by cats, and perhaps knitting. She looks kind and benevolent enough, but it's important to notice that, in general, she has no male equivalent. The phrase itself is a good example of a **language asymmetry**, or a way in which the structure and vocabulary of a language reflects and helps to re-create the social inequalities of the culture in which it exists. What do you call an older man who has never been married? There's *bachelor,* but that term is not age specific in the way old maid is; a bachelor could range in age from 18 to 80, while an old maid, depending on your own sense of what makes someone old, is generally older. In addition, *bachelor* doesn't have a particularly negative connotation attached to it. Most men probably wouldn't mind being called a bachelor, but how do you think many women would respond to being called an old maid?

The existence of the old maid, both as a type of playing card and as a cultural ideal, reveals for us the specific importance of marriage for women. Marriage is a central institution in many cultures. Marriage certainly involves both men and women, but the old maid is a clue to how this institution in places like the United States might be seen as more important for women than for men. The old maid represents a stigmatization of women who do not marry that has no particular equivalent for men. Understanding the importance of marriage for women helps give us a context for understanding a common status for women in later life: widowhood. The old maid who has either chosen or by some set of circumstances outside of her own control remained unmarried is different from the older woman who has lost her married status through the death of her husband. The old maid is somewhat unthinkable in many cultures, where marriage is much more compulsory for women than it is in places like the United States, but looking at the role of the widow in these places tells us a story about the importance of marriage, as well as about how gender changes over the course of our lives.

When you think of the status of widowhood, you may imagine a feminine image similar to that of the old maid, even though men can also be widowed. Widowers (men who have lost their spouse) are generally rarer than widows (women who have lost their husband),

but virtually all widows around the world lose status when they lose their husbands. This loss of status takes various forms. In many parts of India, widows literally become *inauspicious,* people whose presence is undesirable due to a sense that their bad luck in losing their husbands might be contagious to others (Lopata, 1996). In South Korea, widows may move in with their adult sons, but they find themselves with reduced status in the household relative to daughter-in-laws. In places like the United States and Israel, widows suffer from a loss of economic status. What do all these different types of status loss tell us about women and marriage? In many different ways, marriage is a valued status for women and a social role that comes with some degree of power, even if that power has varying levels of limits placed upon it. Widows are forced to exist outside the relative safety of this institution, and they are viewed differently because of that new location.

This loss of status is an intensification of what happens in general to women as they age in many societies. Inequalities that persist between women and men over the whole course of their lives become intensified in old age, resulting in what some gerontologists (people who study aging) call **cumulative disadvantage** (Cruikshank, 2003). The woman in the United States in the past who may not have worked outside of the home for much of her life, or who worked in a job that paid significantly less than her male counterparts, is inevitably at a disadvantage relative to men when she reaches old age. It is only recently that a whole cohort of women who have worked full-time for most of their lives in jobs that allow for a retirement or pension will begin to move into old age. Though many women have worked full-time for paid work outside of the home over the history of the United States, these jobs generally did not provide for or allow women the ability to save for retirement, which as we discussed is a relatively recent social phenomenon. This baby boom generation of working women who will have the economic ability to retire is unprecedented, and researchers are curious to see what their experiences of old age will be like. A person's status in old age becomes a mirror reflection of what happened over the course of their lives, and all status positions they occupied are represented. These inequalities are reflected in the statistics on poverty and aging. In the United States, one third of all older women are likely to be poor or near poor. Among African American women and Latinas, the number increases to 58% and 47% of older women respectively. Poverty is intensified among widowed women because being a widow greatly increases the likelihood of being in poverty; half of all poor widows were not poor before the death of their husbands (Cruikshank, 2003).

Certainly, women in old age and widowhood experience loss of status. This demonstrates for us the centrality of institutions such as marriage to the status of women, as well as the ways in which inequalities are intensified in old age. The social role of wife, though it is changing rapidly in many parts of the world, is still a highly gendered one. If widowhood represents an exit from this highly gendered role, does it not also bring with it a life that is less subject to gender norms and restrictions? Do older, widowed women have the ability to step outside of some of these gendered expectations? The answers to these questions are complicated and contradictory. For some widows in India, typical markers of feminine appearance are not allowed for widowed women. Widows cannot wear flowers, bangles (bracelets), nose rings, or apply *kumkum* (the red dot on the forehead of married Hindu women). In some areas, the widow's head is shaved (Lopata, 1996). These appearance norms have relaxed in many areas of India, especially in more urban areas, but they do represent a kind of defeminization of widows. The purpose of these rituals is to make sure that no men

are attracted to widows, as remarriage of widows is strongly discouraged in Indian society. The removal of these marks of femininity is seen more as a punishment than any kind of reward, and they exist against the historical (and sometimes still contemporary) backdrop of *suttee*. **Suttee** is a Hindu practice of ritual self-immolation (setting oneself on fire), which has been illegal in India since 1829, though cases have occurred as recently as 1987. Widows are literally thought to be to blame for the death of their husbands because of wrongdoing either in this life or previous lives, and they are therefore called upon to fulfill their duty by throwing themselves onto their husband's funeral pyre. So though widowhood in India does diminish femininity to some extent, it is not at all seen as a positive status for women.

This is true for many women in India because of the immense importance of marriage to Indian society. In the contemporary United States, marriage is still important, but certainly less significant than for many women in India. Though most Americans still *will* marry at some point in their lives, the number of single people in the United States is also on the rise. Within this context, widowhood in the United States is less culturally defined than it is in places like India. There are few set expectations and rules about exactly what widows should do or how they should behave, and this has led some researchers to describe being a widow as a **roleless role** (O'Bryant, 1994). One way to demonstrate this is to think about the role requirements involved in *wife* and *mother;* you could probably pretty easily come up with a list of what makes a good wife or mother. But how would you answer the question, what makes a good widow? You'd probably be hard-pressed to generate that list, and many of the characteristics would probably have to do with adapting emotionally and psychologically to being without a husband. Adjusting to widowhood, for many women in the United States, is linked to the process of grieving. There are also changes to self-concept as well as social networks for widowed women in the United States.

When being part of a marriage has become an important part of a person's identity, how do you adjust to the loss of that identity? This is perhaps more difficult for widows, who did not choose to exit that identity as divorced women did. Especially for older widows, the possible range of identity choices may be limited. Some older widows may still be mothers, but if all their children have left the home, it will be difficult for this to become a central identity. Older widows with satisfying jobs outside of the home may be able to rely on their work identity, but for current older generations, this is less likely to be the case. This lack of readily available identities to choose from can lead to a kind of disengagement among widowed women. In addition to the ways in which they think about themselves, widowed women often find themselves having to negotiate the world without the benefit of the interdependent relationship they may have had with their husband. In many marriages, and especially more traditional marriages of past generations, important duties related to managing a household were split along gendered lines. Men often took care of duties such as car maintenance and finances, and some widows are challenged by the need to learn about these more "masculine" concerns at a later stage of life (Lopata, 1996). Dealing with mostly male repairmen, as well as negotiating legal and financial details, is a way in which widowhood forces women to move outside of their previous, comfortable sphere of typical femininity. Though this can be initially stressful, as women progress in their widowhood, they begin to perceive these and other changes more positively. In this sense, the increased self-sufficiency of widows provides an opportunity to

move beyond strict gender roles and can be seen as a positive situation, even if it is somewhat forced upon widows by their circumstances.

Widowhood and old age represent a kind of exiting from one of the main stages for what doing gender would call the performance of gender during the course of our lives. The period of partnering, parenting, and making a living places specific demands on our performances of gender. Widowhood and old age might be perceived as a chance to escape those demands, but a closer examination reveals an important dimension of the way those demands are experienced by real people in their everyday lives. While being a father or a husband or worker may carry with it many responsibilities, it also carries with it many rewards. Responsibilities and rewards alike become important parts of how we think about ourselves, important parts of our identity. We become quite comfortable living in our gender costumes, you might say, and, therefore, taking them off in old age is not easy or even necessarily desirable. Even if old age has the potential to "free" us from gender expectations, this may not be a freedom that many of us want. Certainly in the extreme case of Indian widows, being "freed" from the gendered expectations of marriage is not a positive turn of events. In the United States, widowed women also struggle with their loss of identity upon losing their husbands. What seems to be true is that, though the particular content of the gender costume we wear throughout our lives can change, we become rather attached to the costume itself and are in no hurry to take it off altogether. For many people in the Anglo-European world, we literally wear these gendered costumes into the grave because women and men are usually dressed up in their very best clothes for burial, a dress for women and a suit for men. Though gender is the source of striking inequalities between men and women at the end of their lives, the loss of gendered roles can also be painful and a cause for adjustment. This reveals one of the core contradictions in gender as a category and social system. Though gender as a category creates inequality and often serves as a limit placed upon us as individuals, it can also become an identity to which we feel a real sense of attachment. You might go so far as to say that many of us like being gendered.

Perhaps after what we have explored in this chapter, our attachment to our gender identities should come as no surprise. Our gendered lives begin even before we leave the womb because we enter into societies that have already made decisions about how our sex and gender will be determined. In addition, the content of the cultures into which we are born will partially dictate exactly what gender lessons we learn. Within our families, parents, siblings, and other relatives surround us with subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) messages about what it means to be a gendered person. Even those whose biological makeup does not fit within established sex categories—the intersexed—are still indoctrinated within a gender system. Gender is all around us, and that it quickly becomes internalized by infants and children should therefore come as no surprise. We can understand how gender identities become important to our identities through the socialization theories that emphasize how children are self-motivated to acquire gender. Cognitive development theory and gender schema theory both emphasize the active role of children in accomplishing their own socialization. If we are motivated early on as children to become gendered beings, then it makes sense to think that we would also be sad about losing parts of our gendered identity later in our lives. Exploring gender socialization

helps us to think about the nature of gender as a social phenomenon. If gender is a source of inequality, then certainly part of our mission should be to change gender as a social system, or even to do away with it altogether. But how are we to accomplish such tasks if people are attached to their gender identities in real and important ways? This is just one of the questions we will continue to explore in the next chapters.

BIG QUESTIONS

- In this chapter, we talked about the difficulty of defining a normal or typical story of gender socialization. How does this fit in with some of the theories and concerns regarding gender you've read about in previous chapters? For example, how does it line up with some of the critiques of feminism by women of color, lesbian women, and women from the global South? Why is an understanding of the specific social context important to understanding the process of gender socialization?

- Theories of gender socialization are examples of individual level perspectives on gender because they emphasize how gender becomes internalized. What are potential problems with seeing gender as largely something that operates from the inside out, or as something that internally motivates people?

- Assume you wanted to change your current gender system or do away with gender as a system altogether. Looking at each of the theories of gender socialization covered in this chapter, how would each theory imply you go about doing that? In other words, what course of action does each theory imply if you want to change the way we experience gender? Is this harder or easier to do from the perspective of one of these theories compared to another?

- How would you define what successful socialization is? What criteria would you use to measure whether an adult has been successfully gender socialized? What would gender socialization that was not successful look like? How would these answers change depending on the time period or culture?

- One of the questions raised by the case of intersexed children is what it would mean to raise a child who does not fit into existing sex or gender categories. How could you raise a child without a sex or gender? What problems would this present? How would other people treat this child? How might it affect the way the child thinks about itself and the outside world?

- Some of the theories we discussed in this chapter were developed specifically to explain gender socialization, while others were developed to explain the process of socialization more generally. Are there important differences in these two types of theories? Are there advantages and disadvantages to each approach? Could the gender-specific theories of socialization be used to explain how we learn about other categories, such as race, social class, or sexuality?

- In Chapter 1, we discussed biosocial and strong social constructionist approaches to the relationship between sex and gender. How would you sort these theories into one of these two approaches? Which theories seem to be based on the assumption that there are two different types of people, male and female, and which are based on the assumption that sex itself is socially constructed?

GENDER EXERCISES

1. Try to remember a specific incident or event from your own childhood or adolescence in which you learned what it meant to be masculine or feminine, a boy or a girl. Write a story or an account of that incident. Which theory seems to best explain the process of gender socialization in your own story? Would this particular theory explain all the stories of gender socialization from your own history or just this one in particular?

2. Interview several people who you believe are likely to have experiences of gender socialization that are very different from your own. This could be someone of a different gender, different race, different social class, different sexual orientation, different age, different culture, and so on. Ask them to tell you stories about how they learned what it meant to be a boy or a girl. How do their experiences compare to your own? How do their stories demonstrate the ways in which the specific context in which gender socialization takes place is important?

3. According to gender schema theory, objects, feelings, and descriptions can all be seen as gendered. Come up with a list of objects, feelings, and descriptions, and ask several people to give all the items on your list a gender. Do people have trouble assigning a gender to the items on your list, or does it seem like an easy thing for them to do? Do consistencies emerge in the gender assigned to the items on your list, or are their variations? What does your experiment suggest about the strength of gender schema theory?

4. In this chapter, we discussed the sometimes traumatic socialization experiences of intersexed individuals. Many organizations have been founded to defend the rights and represent the perspectives of intersexed individuals, including the Intersexed Society of North America (ISNA). Go to their website (http://www.isna.org/) and explore some of the materials and information there. How would you characterize their perspective on what it means to be intersexed? What suggestions does the organization make about the best way for dealing with intersexuality? What are some of the issues they raise related to being intersexed? Does their perspective seem to assume that everyone should be made to fit into one of two sex categories (male or female) or that there might be other possibilities beyond male and female?

5. Find some examples of popular media targeted toward children or adolescents. This could include TV commercials, TV shows, cartoons, movies, food (like Happy Meals), toys, video games, radio stations, and websites. What kind of messages do these media seem to be sending to children or adolescents about gender? Do they seem to depict both women and men equally? Do people of different genders seem to be engaged in different kinds of activities? Do you think the messages being sent in these media can be seen to challenge the gender status quo or reinforce it?

6. If you have access to some children (your own, relatives, or the children of friends), spend some time observing them, either playing with them yourself or observing children playing with each other. Or observe some children playing at a local park. Is there a gender to the play you observe? Can you see examples of the gender transgression zone as described in this chapter, or of children patrolling this zone? Do there seem to be differences in gendered behavior among children of different ages? How does that line up with the predictions of some of the theories we discussed in this chapter?

TERMS

socialization

gender socialization

gender norms

gender identity

intersexed

genital tubercle

hermaphrodites

target of socialization

agents of socialization

social learning theory

sex-typed behaviors

identification

cognitive-development theory

gender stability

gender constancy

gender congruency

gender schema theory

schema

gender schema

androcentrism

gender polarization

enculturation

psychoanalytic theory

psychoanalytic identification

ego boundaries

primary socialization

primary groups

one-child policy

hegemonic masculinity

secondary groups

secondary socialization

androgenization

language asymmetry

cumulative disadvantage

suttee

roleless role

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