

CHAPTER 3

Gender Development *The Socialization Process*

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. List reasons why intersections of race and social class are powerful influences on socialization and offer examples related to Asians, Latinos, and African Americans.
2. Briefly describe the key points of the four major theories of gender socialization and with supportive evidence, rank them according to the strength of their explanations.
3. List the “agent of socialization” and identify some of their important effects on gender socialization.
4. Examine efforts toward gender equity through gender-neutral socialization and argue if these efforts can be more or less successful.
5. Identify reasons for son preference in Asia and why this belief is harmful to females of all ages.

Boy: That’s for boys not for girls.

Girl: (Looks worried)

Female Adult: (She) can choose the Spiderman if she wants.

Boy: Not, it’s for boys!

Female Adult: You can choose the Spiderman if you want.

Girl: (Looks distressed). No! I want that one! (points to a Barbie doll).

—Adapted from comments from 4- and 5-year-olds at play
(Cited in Martin, 2011:80)

As this quote suggests, as early as first grade, children have strong ideas about what boys and girls are supposed to do and be. They police one another in gender boundaries even if they are prompted by an adult to stray outside the boundary. They embrace and even celebrate smaller gender differences, in turn obscuring larger gender similarities. From the moment a girl infant is wrapped in a pink blanket and a boy infant is wrapped in a blue blanket, gender role development begins. The colors of pink and blue are among the first indicators used in American society to distinguish female from male. As these infants grow, other cultural artifacts will ensure that this distinction remains

intact. Girls will be given dolls to diaper and tiny stoves on which to cook pretend meals. Boys will construct buildings with miniature tools and wage war with toy guns and tanks. In the teen and young adult years, although both may spend their money on digital music, girls buy cosmetics and clothes and boys buy sports equipment and technical gadgets. The incredible power of gender socialization is largely responsible for such behavior. Pink and blue begin this lifelong process.

Gender Socialization and Cultural Diversity

Socialization is the lifelong process by which, through social interaction, we learn our culture, develop our sense of self, and become functioning members of society. This simple definition does not do justice to the profound impact of socialization. Each generation transmits essential cultural elements to the next generation through socialization. **Primary socialization**, the focus of the research and theory overviewed in this chapter, begins in the family and allows the child to acquire necessary skills to fit into society, especially language and acceptable behavior to function effectively in a variety of social situations. **Continuing socialization** provides the basis for the varied roles an individual will fill throughout life.

Socialization not only shapes our personalities and allows us to develop our human potential, but also molds our beliefs and behaviors about all social groups and the individuals making up those groups. **Gender socialization** is the process by which individuals learn the cultural behavior of femininity or masculinity that is associated with the biological sex of female or male. The forces of social change have collided with gender socialization on a massive scale. To explain gender socialization in contemporary society, it is necessary to understand cultural diversity in all its forms.

Culture and Socialization

As a society's total way of life, **culture** endows us with social heritage and provides guidelines for appropriate behavior. Cultures are organized through **social institutions** that ensure that the basic needs of society are met in established, predictable ways. Although it is the social institution of the family that sets the standards for the emergence of gender roles in children, the family itself is shaped by overall cultural values regarding gender. Parent–child interactions occur in a cultural context in which females have lower power and prestige than males. Beginning in infancy, parents socialize sons to express emotions differently than daughters in ways that support gender differences in power. Institutions overlap in their socialization functions so that one will support and carry on the work of another. For example, the institution of the family is fundamentally responsible for a child's primary socialization, but the work continues with the institution of education when the child enters preschool or kindergarten. Other institutions include the economy, religion, government, and an evolving leisure and recreational institution with a media focus. Like cultures throughout the world, the social institutions in American culture are differentiated according to expectations and norms that form the basis of gender roles. These roles show up in the jobs men and women perform, leisure activities, dress, possessions, language, demeanor, reading material, college major, and even

the frequency they engage in sex and the degree of sexual pleasure they derive. The list is virtually endless.

Culture also provides measures of **social control** to ensure that people more or less conform to a vast array of social norms, including those related to gender. Social control mechanisms that guarantee gender role compliance are often informal but very powerful, such as ridicule, exclusion from peers, and loss of support from family or colleagues. Both boys and girls ridicule boys who play with dolls or toys designed for girls and shun girls who play too aggressively. Adults who challenge workplace norms in which gender role scripts are changing—such as when men choose occupations as child care workers and women choose occupations as plumbers—also remain vulnerable until new norms are in place.

When socialization processes encourage the perpetuation of stereotyped portrayals of the genders, social control is particularly effective. Stereotypical thinking becomes insidious when individuals are harmed because they are defined in terms of assumed negative characteristics assigned to their group. If we stereotype women as passive, an individual woman may be passed over for a job in which leadership qualities are required. Her own individual ability in terms of job leadership may not even be considered due to the stereotype assigned to her entire gender. A man may be denied custody of his child on the basis of stereotypes that view men as inherently less capable of raising children compared to women. Stereotypical thinking about gender is so pervasive that even the law is impacted.

It might appear that the power of socialization creates little robots molded by our culture that uncritically submit to mandated gender roles. However, to argue that the automatons of one generation produce their own carbon copies in the next ignores three important facts. First, socialization is an uneven process taking place on many fronts. We are socialized by parents, siblings, peers, teachers, media, and all other social institutions. We know of achievement-oriented women who are admired for their leadership and men for their effectiveness in caring for young children. Second, we live in diverse, heterogeneous societies made up of numerous **subcultures** that share characteristics in common with the culture in which they exist but also are distinguished from the broader culture in important ways, such as gender patterns. In addition to gender, subcultures are differentiated according to factors such as race, ethnicity, social class, age, sexual orientation, and common interest. Third, subcultural diversity unfolds in an array of gendered patterns that overlap in powerful ways. As discussed in Chapter 1, *intersectionality* reminds us that this overlap must account for level of risk or advantage offered by the multiplicative effects of these formidable statuses (positions), especially in childhood socialization.

Age-based subcultures, for example, are especially important because they emerge at points in the life course that are strongly defined according to gender role norms. For example, age peers in elementary school determine criteria for prestige, which in turn impacts self-esteem, achievement motivation, and academic success. A boy defined as effeminate or a girl defined as a bully has much to lose in this regard. At the other end of the age spectrum, the elderly, too, are not immune to such rankings. Age and gender stereotypes combine to work against divorced or widowed elderly who would like to begin dating. They risk social disapproval through cultural stereotypes that devalue or view sexual activity of the elderly suspiciously. Elderly

widows may be regarded as asexual; elderly widowers, as “dirty old men.” Gender and age stereotypes collide with race and ethnicity in subcultures where remarriage for women—widowed or not—is highly unlikely. These women may be relegated to a life of social exclusion and increased risk of poverty.

Gender Socialization: Social Class and Race

Gender intersects with social class and race as key determinants in how gender roles are enacted. There is a strong correlation between social class and parental values that impact gender. Overall, middle-class parents emphasize autonomy and working-class parents emphasize conformity in socialization. These values translate into gender role flexibility more in middle-class families than in working-class and low-income families. Boys and girls from middle-class homes are offered less rigid gender role choices in behavioral expectations and career development and hold more egalitarian attitudes. Gender role flexibility and autonomy training for both daughters and sons are enhanced in middle-class families with career-oriented mothers. In such families, however, women express higher levels of support for such flexibility and autonomy than men do. Research is less clear on the specific variable that accounts for this pattern. Boys from middle-class homes are more achievement oriented than girls. College students describe white middle-class women in more stereotypical ways than they do for African American women. Families of all races who move upward in social mobility embrace more traditional gender roles (Xiao, 2000; Bumpus et al., 2001; Davis and Pearce, 2007). It may be that race, mother’s employment, and social mobility are more important than social class in determining gender attitudes. Because social class itself is multidimensional and determined by these very factors, it is difficult to sort out the direction of causation.

Asian Families Adding race to the gender role socialization refines these patterns. Overall, available research suggests that in general, children from Asian American homes are more likely to be socialized into less flexible, traditional beliefs about gender than African American and white children. For Asian American children, gender roles emphasize female subordination to all males and older females in a highly patriarchal family structure. This is especially true for Indian American families where traditional ethnic and religious values about gender persist even with highly educated professional parents. Children expect their parents to arrange meetings with prospective marriage partners. Although children have latitude in rejecting marriage candidates, girls are more pressured than boys to marry younger and to reject “serious dating of non-Indian men. Immigrant women from upper caste Brahmin backgrounds recognize the difficulty of navigating their professional and domestic lives. Motherhood is reworked to situate their professional work as complementary to their domestic lives. Mothers are the repositories of ethnic socialization and ensure that both sons and daughters receive strong messages about Indian values related to marriage and American values related to education and upward mobility (Manohar, 2013). Within three generations of immigration, however, unquestioned female subordination weakens considerably, particularly among Chinese, Korean, and Japanese families. Unlike Indians, gendered ethnic messages about marriage are supplanted more quickly with messages about upward mobility of the family,

financial independence, and a college education to achieve both. As Asian American children become more Americanized, both boys and girls begin to exhibit less traditional gender roles (Farley and Alba, 2002; Lien et al., 2004).

Latino Families Data from Latino subcultures (Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and Mexican American) report that females act out gender roles that are more deferential and subordinate than those found in other racial and ethnic groups. There is a great deal of diversity within Latino subcultures in the United States, but they share a Catholic heritage that has a powerful impact on gender roles. Religious socialization fosters women's subservience to men and teaches girls to value motherhood above all other roles. Women are expected to be chaste before marriage and dependent after marriage. Latino parents, especially mothers, are stricter with messages related to sexual risk for girls than for boys (Raffaelli and Ontai, 2004; Killoren and Deutsch, 2013). Latino children also receive socialization messages promoting *familism*, a strong value emphasizing the family and its collective needs over personal and individual needs. Familism helps buffer hypermasculinity (machismo) in boys and serves as a source of prestige for girls, who early in life help with the care and nurturing of the young and the old (Chapter 8).

African American Families Compared to other racial and ethnic groups, research on gender socialization in African American families is more extensive as well as more inconsistent. On the one hand, compared to children of other races, African American children are socialized into views of gender that are less rigid and less stereotyped. African American girls from homes with nontraditional gender roles have high achievement motivation and self-esteem. Compared to white males, African American males—both older children and adults—participate more in housework and child care. Views of what is considered masculine and feminine are often blurred in African American homes (Chapter 8).

Raising Daughters On the other hand, evidence suggests that African American women encourage independence and self-reliance in their daughters but at the same time encourage them to accept other parts of a female role that are highly traditional. Mothers are less likely to grant freedom to explore expanded roles. Daughters report that their mothers are overly protective, and mothers report that their daughters' behavior needs to be closely monitored, especially in relation to sexuality (Townshend, 2008). Both mothers and fathers prepare their daughters more for racial bias than for gender bias (Cole and Guy-Shetfall, 2003; Shearer, 2008).

Raising Sons That being said, however, mothers of sons are more concerned about racial discrimination and mothers of daughters are more concerned about gender discrimination. Fathers send stronger racial socialization messages to their sons. Fathers communicate racial pride and offer strategies for coping with racial discrimination. They underscore the importance of positive male role models for their sons with an emphasis on masculine values of strength and leadership. At the same time, some fathers send messages to their young sons about "toughening up," to be strong physically and emotionally (Howard et al., 2013; Cooper et al., 2014). Racial discrimination concerns generally trump gender discrimination concerns. Perhaps it

is difficult for parents to perceive sexism (gender discrimination) for boys. This pattern is not a benign one. Mothers with higher concerns for racial discrimination have lower expectations for children's academic success, especially for their sons (Varner and Mandara, 2013). The net effect of these socialization practices is a reinforcement of traditional gender roles.

African American views about gender are also mediated by family and school, and the race/social class intersection in these settings. In father-present lower-income homes, for example, sons hold more rigid beliefs about masculinity. In father-absent lower-income homes, socialization fosters daughters to adopt more masculine roles and sons to adopt less masculine roles (Mandara et al., 2005). Young African American girls attending predominantly white middle-income schools are less assertive than those attending predominantly African American lower-income schools (Scott, 2000).

Intersectionality To sort out findings that appear to be contradictory for African Americans, a host of factors need to be accounted for. The socialization work of African American parents is strongly influenced by social inequalities in American society that work against beliefs about gender equity (Hill, 2005). African American children who are already facing a rough road because of racial discrimination may find it easier to adopt rather than challenge traditional gender roles if it means one less barrier to overcome. Historical patterns of gender role configurations in African American subcultures also help in understanding the contradictions. High regard for the independence and initiative of African American women is normative. In this sense, the “traditional” gender role of women is one of strength and resilience rather than weakness and resignation (Chapter 8). Mothers teach daughters not only to resist oppression, but also to accommodate African American institutions, such as the church, that may be more in line with patriarchy existing in the broader culture (Pittman, 2005). Most important, African American children tend to adopt less polarized views of gender. Males and females are not “opposites” with completely different expectations. Both men and women are encouraged to be nurturing and assertive. As we will see in this chapter, concepts of masculinity and femininity are not theoretically useful or productive for social life if they continue to be polarized. Supporting an intersectional model, the research is inconsistent when race, class, and gender are separated and when white middle-class standards of masculinity and femininity are applied to all of the African American experiences.

The concepts and research reviewed here are important for understanding the three major theories of gender socialization—social learning, cognitive development, and gender schema theories—and the newest variety, social cognitive theory.

Theories of Gender Socialization

All theories of gender socialization focus on primary socialization and how children learn **gender identity**, when they become aware that the two sexes (male and female) behave differently, and that different gender roles (masculine and feminine) are proper. Like socialization overall, gender socialization is mediated through a number of important elements, such as biology, personality, social interaction context, and the social institutions. Different theories give different

weight to each element. Freudian psychologists and sociobiologists contend that unconscious motivation and biologically driven evolutionary demands are powerful socialization forces (Chapter 2). Sociologists, social psychologists, and many personality psychologists emphasize social interaction over biology as the key socialization force. This focus on the context of social interaction has allowed for significant interdisciplinary work between psychology and sociology in building theories of gender socialization.

Social Learning Theory

Unlike Freud's psychoanalytic approach, which focuses on internal conflict in socialization (Chapter 2), social learning theory focuses on observable behavior. For social learning theorists, socialization is based on rewards (reinforcing appropriate behavior) and punishments (extinguishing inappropriate behavior). They are concerned with the ways children model the behaviors they view in others, such as cooperation and sharing or selfishness and aggression. Imitation and modeling appear to be spontaneous in children, but through reinforcement, patterns of behavior develop that eventually become habitual.

As with other behaviors, gender roles are learned directly through reprimands and rewards and indirectly through observation and imitation (Bandura and Walters, 1963; Mischel, 1966). The logic is simple. In gender socialization, different expectations lead to differential reinforcement from parents, peers, and teachers for doing either "boy" or "girl" things. Boys may be praised by peers for excelling in male sports such as football but derided for excelling in female games such as jump rope. Girls may be praised by peers for embroidering table linens but derided for preferring to play with toy soldiers rather than baby dolls. Gender identity is developed when children associate the label of boy or girl with the rewards that come with the appropriate behavior and then act out gender roles according to that perception. Parents and teachers model gender roles during the critical primary socialization years, and children imitate accordingly. This results in continued reinforcement of the valued gender identity. Social learning theory thus assumes that "knowledge about gender roles either precedes or is acquired at the same time as gender identity" (Intons-Peterson, 1988:40).

Gender Socialization for Boys According to social learning theory, boys and girls are not parallel in the acquisition of gender role knowledge during the primary socialization years. Early research on gender socialization conducted by David Lynn (1969) accounts for his assertion that boys encounter more difficulty on the socialization path than girls. Lynn asserted that because fathers are not as available as mothers during early childhood, boys have limited opportunities to model the same-gender parent. And when the father is home, the contact is qualitatively different from contact with the mother in terms of intimacy. Given that adult male role models are generally scarce in early childhood, boys struggle to put together a definition of masculinity based on incomplete information. They are often told what they should not do rather than what they should do. "Don't be a sissy" and the classic "big boys don't cry" are examples. Girls have an easier time because of continuous contact with the mother and the relative ease of using her as a model.

Lynn further contended that it is the lack of exposure to males at an early age that leads boys to view masculinity in a stereotyped manner. For males, masculine gender roles are more inflexible than those offered to females. It is this gender role inflexibility that is a critical factor in making male socialization difficult and may explain why males express more insecurity about their gender identity. The consequences of this narrow view of masculinity are many. Male peer groups encourage the belief that aggression and toughness are virtues. Males exhibit hostility toward both females and homosexuals, and cross-gender behavior in boys (“sissies”) is viewed more negatively than when it occurs in girls (“tomboys”). Women are more accepting of children who cross gender lines in their behavior. Fear of ridicule propels males, especially adolescents, to use homophobic and sexist remarks to ensure that they are protecting their masculinity (Chapter 9). Although research does not confirm that modeling per se is responsible for gender role acquisition, it does suggest that gender-appropriate behavior is strongly associated with social approval. Although laden with uncertainty and inflexibility, boys express adamant preference for the masculine role. A boy learns that his role is the more desirable one and that it brings more self-esteem.

Gender Socialization for Girls Other social learning theorists state that it is a mistake to conclude that the socialization path for girls is easy simply because mothers are more available to girls as models during early childhood. Even young children are bombarded with messages suggesting that higher worth, prestige, advantages, and rewards are accorded to males compared to females. Boys can readily embrace the gender roles flowing from these messages. Girls, in contrast, are offered subordinate, less prestigious roles that encourage deference and dependence, and they must model behavior that may be less socially valued. Research on teen movies shows that girls are often portrayed in negative, gender stereotypical ways—as socially aggressive, bullying, selfish, and disloyal to female friends (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2008). If modeling and reinforcement are compelling enticements to behavior, as social learning theory suggests, a girl would understandably become quite anxious about being encouraged to perform roles or model behavior held in lower esteem. For socialization overall, girls have the advantage of gender role flexibility, but boys have the advantage of a higher-prestige gender role.

Critique Children are not the passive recipients of rewards and punishments that social learning theorists envision. Because children routinely choose gender-inconsistent behavior, the reinforcement and modeling processes are far more complex. First, children may not model same-gender parents, teachers, or peers or may choose other-gender models outside the family who offer alternatives to gender role behavior that enhance self-esteem. A girl may be rewarded for a masculine activity, such as excelling in sports, but she keeps a tight hold on other aspects of her feminine role. Second, social learning theory minimizes the importance of social change, a significant factor in gender socialization. Families are more diverse than the stereotyped “at-home mother and outside home father” that are used to explain the rocky socialization paths for girls and boys. Divorce, blended families, single parenting, and an increasing number of nonresident parents who are mothers instead of fathers have created a wide range of models for gender socialization (Chapter 8).

Third, other statuses also vie for the attention of both child and parent during primary socialization. Birth order and age of child may be as important as gender in determining how parents behave toward their children. Finally, children experience subcultural family influences in which siblings and adults take on a range of nontraditional roles, such as in single-parent families. And regardless of the different paths offered to them, both girls and boys learn to prefer their own gender and strongly endorse the roles associated with it.

Cognitive Development Theory

Cognitive development explanations for gender socialization contrast sharply with social learning theory. Jean Piaget's (1896–1980) interest in how children gradually develop intelligence, thinking, and reasoning laid the foundation for cognitive development theory. His work is consistent with symbolic interaction theory regarding his ideas that cognitive abilities are developed in stages through ongoing social interaction. Simply stated, the mind matures through interaction with the environment. Behavior depends on how a person perceives a social situation at each cognitive stage (Piaget, 1950, 1954). Cognitive theory stresses a child's active role in structuring and interpreting the world.

Building on Piaget's work, Lawrence Kohlberg (1966) claimed that children learn their gender roles according to their level of cognitive development—in essence, their degree of comprehension of the world. One of the first ways a child comprehends the world is by organizing reality through his or her **self**, the unique sense of identity that distinguishes each individual from all other individuals, and a highly valued part of the child's existence. Anything associated with the self becomes highly valued as well. By age 3, children begin to self-identify by gender and accurately apply gender-related labels to themselves and often to others. By age 6, *gender constancy* is in place. Gender is permanent: A girl knows that she is a girl and will remain one. Only then, Kohlberg asserts, is gender identity said to be developed. Gender identity becomes a central part of self, invested with strong emotional attachment. Studies on gender concepts of children ages 3–5 offer support for the cognitive development approach to using gender identity to organize and label gender-related behavior. These labels form the basis for gender stereotypes and expectations about gender-related behavior (Martin et al., 2004). Thus, cognitive development theory offers a good explanation for the development of gender-typing during primary socialization: When children finally figure out what gender means in their lives, they embrace that understanding in ways that create and then reinforce gender stereotypes.

Once gender identity is developed, much behavior is organized around it. Children seek models that are labeled as “girl” or “boy” and “female” or “male,” and in turn, identification with the same-sex parent can occur. Although children base much of their behavior on reinforcement, cognitive theorists see a different sequence in gender socialization than do social learning theorists. This sequence is “I am a boy; therefore, I want to do boy things; therefore, the opportunity to do boy things (and to gain approval for doing them) is rewarding” (Kohlberg, 1966:89). Reinforcements are important, but the child chooses behavior and roles according to the sense of self. Even young children use their knowledge of gender roles to bolster this sense of

self by engaging in gender-typed behaviors. In this way, cognitive development theory supports a self-socialization process. Children choose whom they want to imitate and how the imitation may be played out (Zosuls et al., 2011; Patterson, 2012). Individual differences in gender roles are accounted for by the different experiences of children. Children may subsequently repeat these experiences based on reinforcement, so there is some consistency with social learning theory. There is wide support for the cognitive development approach to gender role socialization. Children are gender detectives. Their interests and activities—such as appearance, play, toys, and friendships—are based on their beliefs about gender compatibility, a pattern that cuts across race, ethnicity, and social class (Alexander and Wilcox, 2012; Halim et al., 2014). Children value their own gender more and believe theirs is superior to the other. Early in life children develop the ability to classify characteristics by gender and choose behavior according to that classification (Miller et al., 2006).

Critique Like social learning, cognitive development theory cannot account for all gender role socialization. The cognitive development model also has been criticized because a key assertion is that children will actively choose gender-typed behavior only after they understand gender constancy. Gender constancy appears by age 6, but gender-typed preferences in play and toy selections are already in place by age 2 or 3. Cognitive development theory assumes that these preferences are based on gender identity. For the model to fit neatly with the stages outlined in cognitive development, gender identity must come before an understanding of gender constancy. To date, research has been unable to confirm this sequence. In countering this criticism, cognitive theorists suggest that all that is needed for gender identity is simple, rudimentary knowledge about gender. *Gender stability*, where the child views the same gender role behavior over and over in a variety of contexts, will suffice even if the child cannot fully comprehend gender constancy. Simple knowledge about gender stability allows children to begin to label accurately who is a girl and who is a boy. Critics still argue, however, that the acquisition of knowledge about gender stability is not as simple as cognitive development theorists describe. For children to determine patterns of gender stability, they must experience social interaction in a relatively large number of contexts. It is unlikely that this interaction will be either uniform or consistent in terms of gender. Understanding the supposedly simple idea of gender stability may be as complicated for children as understanding gender constancy (Renk et al., 2006; Stockard, 2007).

Gender Schema Theory

Gender schema theory is an important subset of cognitive development theory. **Schemas** are cognitive structures used to understand the world, interpret perception, and process new information. Sandra Bem, one of the most prominent gender schema theorists, contends that once the child learns cultural definitions of gender, these schemas become the core around which all other information is organized (Bem, 1981, 1983, 1987). Consistent with cognitive development theory, before a schema is created to process gender-related information, children must be at the cognitive level to identify gender accurately. Infants as young as 9 months can distinguish between male and female, but it is between ages 2 and 3 that this

identification becomes associated with giant leaps in gender knowledge. Schemas tell children what they can and cannot do according to their gender. Even coloring books are highly gender stereotyped. Equalitarian images are hard to find, and very few female characters engage in male activities or occupations. Gender schema theory suggests that limited and stereotyped images for girls may disallow them from thinking about different alternatives in life (Fitzpatrick and McPherson, 2010). Schemas affect children's behavior and influence their self-esteem. A child's sense of self is linked to how closely his or her behavior matches accepted gender schemas. When a girl learns that prescriptions for femininity in her culture include being polite and kind, these behaviors are incorporated into her emerging gender schema, and she adjusts her behavior accordingly.

Gender schemas of parents impact how they behave toward their children and, in turn, how this influences their children's development. Significant, positive correlations between parent and child gender schemas are consistently reported. Parents with traditional gender schemas are more likely to have children with gender-typed cognitions than are parents with nontraditional schemas (Leaper and Friedman, 2007). By 18 months, children can associate cultural symbols with gender—pictures of fire hats and hammers are associated with males; pictures of dolls and teddy bears, with females (Eichstedt et al., 2002). As adults, gender-based processing directs people to use language according to gender role orientation (Chapter 4). These studies support Sandra Bem's contention that the way parents behave toward children and the way symbols are classified are directed by a gender schematic network of cultural associations that we learn to accept. In cultures that rigidly adhere to beliefs about gender differences, gender schemas are likely to be even more complex.

Other support for the influence of gender schemas comes from research indicating that people have a selective memory bias for information congruent with gender. Children and adults can recall personal experiences, activities, people, media, and reading material more accurately and vividly when the information is presented in gender stereotypical ways (Ruble et al., 2006). Schemas are guided by gender to fill in gaps when other information is ambiguous. In the absence of relevant information about the strengths of a political candidate, for example, people default to gender of the candidate to process the information (Chang and Hitchon, 2004). We also revert to gender schema to sort out information that is gender inconsistent. Gender stereotype-congruent tasks are completed more quickly. Boys can manipulate mechanical toys faster than girls; girls can dress a doll quicker than boys (Knight et al., 2004). Children presented with pictures of girls and boys engaged in nontraditional roles, such as a girl sawing wood or a boy sewing, will recall the picture in a gender-consistent way—the boy is sawing, and the girl is sewing (Martin and Ruble, 2004:68). Even young children exaggerate or invent male-female differences even if none exist, a pattern carried through to adulthood.

Cultural Lenses The cultural impact on gender acquisition can be refined further using a gender schema model. Referred to as *cultural lenses*, every culture contains assumptions about behavior that are contained throughout its social institutions and within the personalities of individuals. Sociologists assert that these lenses consist of a society's values, beliefs, and norms. Sandra Bem (1993) suggests

that in American culture, three gender lenses are most prominent: gender polarization (shared beliefs that females and males are different and opposite beings), biological essentialism (biology produces natural, inevitable gender roles), and androcentrism (males are superior to females). Despite massive research evidence against gender polarization and biological essentialism, the beliefs persist and in turn are used to justify androcentrism. These beliefs become another set of gender schemas in which to organize behavior. Children accept them without recognizing that alternatives are possible. As adults, they cannot envision their society—or any other for that matter—organized according to a different set of gender schemas. Gender schema theory helps explain why a person’s world becomes so differentiated by gender over the life course.

The notion of cultural lenses provides a good interdisciplinary link to macro-level sociology. Functionalists are interested in identifying core cultural and subcultural gender lenses that influence social order and social change. Monitoring these gender cultural lenses over time can offer insight into the functional and dysfunctional consequences of gender roles for society as a whole. In cultures that rigidly adhere to beliefs about gender differences, gender schemas are likely to be even more complex. The influence of gender schemas may help explain why it is so difficult to dislodge gender stereotypical thinking once it is placed during childhood.

Gender schema theory may be the best alternative in explaining not only how people develop gender identities, but also how gender stereotypes can be modified. Boys who view reading as a feminine activity can be introduced to boy-friendly books to encourage reading development and enhanced literacy (Sokal et al., 2005). Research on computer use and information technology (IT) suggests that there is a gendered digital divide, but when people are made aware of the influence of gender on their thinking about computers, gender schematic thinking may be reprocessed to be more aschematic. Several generations of children have grown up with computers being integral to their daily lives, but the centrality of computers to adolescent girls is less important than it is for adolescent boys. Course work on computers and video game imagery are designed according to gender schemas of boys, in turn contributing to the underrepresentation of women in IT careers. However, when girls who identify with more traditional gender roles are introduced to website development with gender-friendly aspects, such as those designed around gender schematic themes of inclusion, social connectedness, and flexibility, interest in computers is heightened. Research also demonstrates that IT women have different gender schema than women in the general public and that IT men have different gender schema than men in the general public (Agosto, 2004; Cooper, 2006; Lemons and Parzinger, 2007). When taken-for-granted notions about gender are examined, course work can be modified to account for gender schemas in a productive manner.

Critique As a cognitive model, gender schema theory is subject to the same set of criticisms noted earlier, but two others also need to be considered. First, gender schema theory has difficulty explaining gender schemas of those who consider themselves transgendered. Are transgendered people who identify only a few traits associated with their own sex “gender aschematic”? Gender schema theory rests largely on the assertion that virtually everyone is gender schematic.

Second, gender schema theory has difficulty explaining inconsistent developmental aspects of gender-related perceptions and behaviors. Gender schema theorists would predict that because early childhood is so rigid and inflexible in gender stereotyping, the path is set for gender intensification to continue to increase. Adolescents, especially girls, however, are more flexible and less stereotyped in many of their gender-related activities and choices (Ruble et al., 2006). Environmental cues shift as contexts change. These appear to be powerful influences on role preferences even if they are inconsistent with gender schemas (Signorella and Frieze, 2008). Other schemas—such as those based on age, ethnicity, and religion—may compete, crosscut, or intersect with gender schemas as guides to behavior (Campbell et al., 2004). Gender stereotypes may be in place by adulthood, but ample evidence suggests that they tend to weaken over time (Campbell et al., 2004; Cherney, 2005).

Social Cognitive Theory

Notice that the criticisms of the theories of gender socialization reviewed here fall short in accounting for inconsistent messages children receive about gender from a variety of ever-changing sources. As a newer model, social cognitive theory taps into the strong points of all three theories to understand the degree to which children actively choose their gender roles (a key element in cognitive development and gender schema theories) and how much imitation and reinforcement are needed for gender roles to be learned (a key element in social learning theory) (Kunkel et al., 2006). As articulated by Albert Bandura, a prominent name associated with social learning theory, a social cognitive approach to gender socialization highlights the rapid expansion of knowledge from observations, the self-regulation of behavior once knowledge is gained, and the self-reflection that evaluates the selected behavior (Bussey and Bandura, 1999; Bandura and Bussey, 2004).

Social cognitive theory has been used to explain the connection between gender and the selection of sports role models. As predicted by social learning theory, girls and boys overwhelmingly nominate role models of their own gender. However, when girls choose role models from among sports figures, they often pick males rather than females. Social cognitive theory explains these choices according to the image of sports as a male domain and the level of influence wielded by men in the domain (Adriaanse and Crosswhite, 2008). Although girls are more likely than boys to be outsiders, sports from an outsider perspective makes their gender stereotypes stronger. Level of inference also is accounted for when children evaluate their parents on the importance of sports for health behavior (Shakib and Dunbar, 2004). Adolescents receive subtle messages about gender and sports from fathers and mothers and evaluate how their parents act out these messages. Do both parents actively participate in sports for the benefit of physical exercise? Do fathers participate more or less than mothers? Social cognitive theory might argue that gender stereotypes about sports communicated in families during primary socialization make fathers more influential role models than mothers for boys but mothers are more influential role models than fathers for girls. In this way, social cognitive theory accounts for apparent contradictions in selection of gender role models for children.

When combined with a symbolic interaction perspective, social cognitive theory provides a good foundation for interdisciplinary approaches to gender role

socialization. In emphasizing the importance that symbolic interactionists attach to role-taking, social cognitive theory may suggest that when children take on a variety of roles, including those related to gender, opportunities are available for behavior to be rewarded, punished, and imitated. Roles are also carefully evaluated to determine the relative influence of some people as models compared to others. For example, self-reported homophobia aggression in high school youth is predicted by their observations of aggression among peers they use as role models (Prati, 2012). Adolescents take into account parents, peers, and teachers as role models and judge the importance of each for determining future behavior in many contexts. Adolescents use both processes, but the judgment of the level of influence (symbolic interaction and social cognitive theory) is more important than the modeling (social learning theory). Congruent with gender socialization, same-gender parents, peers, and teachers would be judged as more influential than other-gender parents, peers, and teachers.

Critique Of all the theories of gender socialization, social cognitive theory appears to offer the best integrative model to explain contradictory research results on gender related to the influence of a child's choice of role models. However, social cognitive theory has yet to provide answers to two important questions about primary socialization: First, when does "active self-socialization" occur—before or after the selection of role models? Second, which is more important in the process—the child's active choices or the availability of the role model itself? In other words, can a child internalize and act out beliefs about gender if there are no role models already in place?

Social cognitive theory does resonate with sociology's assertion that various subsystems, or agents, operate interdependently in the process of gender socialization. Social cognitive theory is a psychological view of social interaction that focuses on the individual and how social interaction shapes his or her feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Nevertheless, for social cognitive theory to be a good bridge between the disciplines, it needs to incorporate more fully a sociological view of social interaction and to account for ongoing social interaction in social situations according to how individuals change because of the interaction. How are gender stereotypes of adolescent boys altered when they interact with star school athletes who also enjoy activities such as cooking and child care?

Social cognitive theory offers very productive leads for explanations of gender role socialization, but it is not a fully integrative model. Such a model must incorporate key elements of social learning, cognitive development, and gender schema theories as well as integrate the psychological and sociological approaches. Understandably, this tall order has yet to be filled.

Agents of Socialization

Agents of socialization are the people, groups, and social institutions that provide the critical information needed for children to become fully functioning members of society. Functionalists point out that if these agents do not carry out their socialization tasks properly, social integration may be compromised. Conflict theorists point out

that these agents offer varying degrees of power, allowing socialization advantages to some groups and disadvantages to others. These agents do not exist independently of one another and are often inconsistent in the gendered messages they send. Later chapters will be devoted to each agent, but the focus here will be on those agents that are the most influential in determining gender roles during primary socialization.

The Family

The family is by far the most significant agent of socialization. Although social change has increased family diversity and created more opportunities for children to be influenced by other social institutions, the family continues to play the pivotal role in primary socialization. The family is responsible for shaping a child's personality, emerging identity, and self-esteem. Children gain their first values and attitudes from the family, including powerful messages about gender. Learned first in the family and then reinforced by other social institutions, gender is fundamental to the shaping of all social life. Gender messages dominate and are among the best predictors of a range of later attitudes and behaviors.

Do You Want a Boy or a Girl? The first thing expectant parents say in response to this question is “We want a healthy baby.” Then they state a gender preference. Preference for one gender over the other is strong. Most couples agree on their preference for male over female children, especially for a first or only child, a consistent finding for over half a century in the United States (Newport, 2011). We will see that it also holds true for most of the world. Males are stronger in these preferences than females. There are important exceptions, however, to the son-preference finding when surveying individuals rather than couples. Reviews of data from the United States and some European countries, including gender-equitable Scandinavia, find that college women, first-time pregnant women, and middle-class young adults state a daughter preference or no preference more often than a son preference (Andersson et al., 2006; Dahl et al., 2006; Strow and Brasfield, 2006).

A key issue in understanding parental gender preferences is parity. The ideal for couples in the United States and much of the developed world is to have two children, one boy and one girl. It is well documented that couples with two children of the same gender are more likely to try for a third child than those with one son and one daughter (Andersson et al., 2007; Kippen et al., 2007). Parity is also related to sex selection technology (SST), which increases the chances of having a child of the preferred gender.

Data on attitudes toward use of SST for a firstborn child show a preference for a firstborn son. When considering the gender balance issue, couples who use SST are more likely to try for a boy if they have two girls compared to couples who try for a girl if they have two boys. Such choices have a major impact on these families because the number of children is significantly higher in families with firstborn girls (Swetkis et al., 2002; Dahl and Moretti, 2008).

Internet sites spawned by SST increase public awareness and bolster its legitimacy. Regardless of whether a boy or girl is preferred, it is clear from blogs, self-help

sites, and Internet support forums that SST strongly reinforces the gender binary. The following research examples from such sites suggest this legitimacy.

These women do not question whether the sex of the child should matter. They take it as a given. Just as it is different being a boy or a girl, they say it is equally different being a parent to a boy than to a girl (As described by an SST research participant). I wanted have someone to play Barbies with and to go shopping with; I wanted the little girl with long hair and pink and doing fingernails. They speak of Barbies and ballet and butterfly barrettes. They also describe their desire to rear strong young women. (Cited in Bhatia, 2010:268, 271)

Gender Socialization in Early Childhood Gender-typing begins in the womb. Evidence suggests that when the sex of the fetus is known, mothers modify activities according to beliefs about male strength and female fragility. She may engage in more rigorous exercise and physical activities if she is carrying a male. Parents talk about the fetus in gendered terms. Males may be described as active and kicking; females, as quiet and calm. Gender of the child is one of the strongest predictors of how parents will behave toward their children, a finding that is reported globally and one that crosses racial and ethnic lines in the United States (Raley and Bianchi, 2006; Carothers and Reis, 2013). Parents are likely to describe infant sons as strong, tough, and alert and infant daughters as delicate, gentle, and awkward, regardless of the weight or length of their infants. Fathers are more stereotyped in their assessments than mothers. Socialization by parents encourages gender-appropriate norms allowing separation, independence, and more risk-taking for boys and connection, interdependence, and more cautious behaviors for girls (Kline and Wilcox, 2013). While Dick is allowed to cross the street, use scissors, or go to a friend's house by himself, Jane must wait until she is older.

Gendered Childhood: Clothing, Toys, and Play Proud parents deposit their newborns in a household ready to accommodate either a boy or a girl. The baby also is welcomed into the home by greeting cards from friends and family that display consistent gender-stereotyped messages. Indeed, gender-neutral cards for any age are largely nonexistent. Pink- and pastel-colored cards for darling, sweet, and adorable girls and cards in primary colors for strong, handsome, and active boys are standard. The first artifacts acquired by the infant are toys and clothes. In anticipating the arrival of the newborn, friends and relatives choose gifts that are neutral to avoid embarrassing themselves or the expectant parents by colors or toys that suggest the “wrong” gender. When they know the gender of the child in advance, these selections are much easier. Teddy bears and clothing in colors other than pink or blue are safe bets.

Most parents, however, do know their baby's sex before birth and decorate the child's room accordingly. If parents choose not to know the sex of the baby in advance, decorations for either gender will be chosen. But within weeks of the baby's arrival, the infant's room is easily recognizable as belonging to a girl or a boy. Until recently, toys for toddlers were likely to be gender neutral, but that pattern has changed dramatically in less than a decade. Manufacturers offer gender lines for almost all their toys, even if the toys have the same function. Girls and boys play with

the same building blocks but in different colors; girls' are pink and purple and boys' are in darker primary colors. Infant girls cuddle pink-clad teddy bears and dolls, and infant boys cuddle blue-clad teddy bears and dolls. When you inspect toy ads, note that these dolls are virtually indistinguishable in all of the features except the color of the clothing. By age 2, children begin to reject toys designed for the other gender and select those designed for their own gender. By preschool, children have a firm commitment to own-gender toys and tend to reject other-gender toys as well as the children playing with other-gender toys, especially if a boy is playing with a girl's toy.

Color-coded and gender-typed clothing of infants and children are widespread and taken for granted (Paoletti, 2012). Pink and yellow on girls are sharply contrasted with blue and red on boys. Although pants for school and casual wear are now more common than dresses, girls' clothing is likely in pastels with embroidered hearts and flowers. Given that pants for girls often do not have pockets, a purse becomes a necessity. Both boys and girls wear T-shirts and sweatshirts. Boys wear those that have superhero and athletic motifs, and girls wear those depicting female television characters or nature scenes. Pictures of outstanding male athletes are typically represented in nonathletic clothing for boys and sometimes for girls, but it is unusual to find female athletes depicted on clothing for girls. Halloween costumes provide a good example of gender-typing in clothing. Gender-neutral costumes are rare at Halloween, with hero costumes highly favored by both boys and girls. Girl heroes are clustered around beauty queens and princesses, and boy heroes are clustered around warriors, especially villains and symbols of death. Animal costumes are favored for younger children, but these, too, are gender-typed. The pink dragon is female, and the blue teddy bear is male (Nelson, 2000). Gender-oriented clothing and accessories provide the initial labels to ensure that children are responded to according to gendered norms. If an infant girl's gender is not readily identifiable by her clothing, she may have a bow attached to her bald head so that she will not be mistaken for a boy.

Dolls A clothing–toy link carries a formidable force for socialization, especially for girls who buy “fashions” for their dolls. Dolls for girls, especially Barbies, and “action figures” for boys (advertisers will never call them dolls) are standard gifts to children from parents. Not only are messages about beauty, clothing, and weight sent to girls via Barbie, but girls also learn about options and preferences in life. Barbie has held a variety of jobs, including flight attendant, ballerina, fashion model, teacher, and aerobics instructor. At the height of the women's movement in the 1970s, she graduated from medical school as a surgeon and joined the army in the 1980s. Regardless of job, she prefers pink and purple outfits and accessories. She broke up with Ken after 43 years together, but they recently reunited. Barbie does have nonwhite friends, but except for skin color, they are identical in shape and size to classic white Barbie. Celebrating her fiftieth birthday in 2009, Barbie remains a powerful socialization icon for girls throughout the world.

Dolls for girls are increasingly sexualized, a trend Barbie has largely avoided. Dolls wear black leather miniskirts, thigh-high boots, and thongs, with the same items appearing on shelves in clothing stores for tween girls, often under “eye candy” and “wink wink” slogans. The theories of socialization reviewed in this chapter may explain the process differently, but all recognize the gender detriment that is associated with childhood sexualization. With its powerful media connection, the

sexualized dolls and clothing for tween girls are linked to self-objectification, feelings of powerless and vulnerability, and threats to desires, competency, health, and overall well-being (Hatch, 2011). Parents who are dismayed by the grip of Barbie in their households may find an advantage to encouraging their preadolescent daughters to continue to play with Barbie-type dolls until they are out of the doll stage of life.

A generation ago the male counterpart of Barbie was G.I. Joe. Although today G.I. Joe is sold mainly to nostalgic adult men, it was the prototype for subsequent action figures. The action figures currently sold to boys have larger body frames and are more muscular than the original figures. These figures can be bent, and their bodies can be manipulated to emphasize movement and complex activities. Except for baby-type dolls, girls play with dolls that have few joints and limited options for staging movement. Girls equate beauty and style with Barbie. Boys equate good looks and ruggedness with heroic action figures. Messages about masculine and feminine embodiment ideals are sent to both boys and girls through these toys. Today G.I. Joe has his own franchise, including movies in a military-themed universe (Truitt, 2013). Combined with an entertainment-based youth culture, gendered toys are another link to lower self-esteem, damaging notions regarding physical activity, and the origins of eating disorders in children (Chapter 2).

Toys and Gender Scripts Toys for girls encourage domesticity, interpersonal closeness, and a social orientation. Boys receive more categories of toys, their toys are more complex and expensive, and the toys foster self-reliance and problem solving. Toys for boys are likely to be designed for action (race cars, trains, weapons, building, and outdoor play). Toys for girls are likely to be designed for housework (ironing, cooking, sewing, cleaning) and beauty (hairstyling, cosmetics, glamorous clothing for dolls). As they get older, Dick and Jane acquire toys that encourage more imagination, pretense, and role-taking. Pretend play is developed earlier in girls, but by second grade, boys surpass girls in imaginative play. Girls script their play and stage their activities more realistically, largely having to do with caretaking of dolls and playing house. The major exception to this pattern is the prevailing “princess” scenario that girls embrace, often to the chagrin of their nontraditional parents (Orenstein, 2006). Boys script their play around fantasies related to superheroes, dragons and dinosaurs, wars in space, and aliens. The toys associated with the scripts are rated as competitive, violent, exciting, and dangerous (Blakemore and Centers, 2005). Girls do have one advantage over boys in their toy selections: They are allowed to cross over and play with toys designed for boys. Even so-called gender-neutral toys still resemble toys for boys in color, such as primary color blocks. These keep the appeal for boys but allow them to be purchased for girls (Auster and Mansbach, 2012). Playing with male-oriented toys in childhood is associated with sports participation and early development of manipulative and mechanical skills. Given that boys are discouraged from playing with toys designed for girls, if boys are restricted in their play, it is due to lack of encouragement in scripting activities suggestive of domestic roles, such as caring for children (no dolls allowed) and doing housework.

Both parents and children express clear preferences for gender-typed toys. These preferences reinforce the persistent gender-related messages that are sent to children through the toys. On your next outing to a toy store, note how shelves are categorized



according to gender and how pictures on the boxes suggest how boys and girls should use the toys. Little Jane uses her tea set to give parties for dolls in her room, whereas same-age Dick is experimenting with sports or racing trucks outside in the mud. Siblings and peers ensure that the children will play with toys or stage games in gender-specific ways. The gender-related messages, in turn, show up in differences between girls and boys in cognitive and social development in childhood as well as differences in gender roles as adults. Despite massive social change impacting the genders, gender-typed preferences in toys not only persist, but also appear to be growing.

Gendered Parenting As social learning theorists suggest, through the toys and clothes children receive during early childhood, parents send powerful messages about what is or is not gender appropriate. In turn, children come to expect that their mothers will respond to them differently than their fathers. Parenting practices thus vary not only according to the gender of the child, but also according to the gender of the parent. By preadolescence, children expect responses from their parents according to traditional instrumental-expressive gender role stereotypes. Children as young as 3 years believe not only that their parents will approve of them more when they play with gender-typed toys, but also that fathers will disapprove more if boys play with girls' toys. Children expect mothers to soothe hurt feelings more than fathers. They expect to have more time with their fathers for recreation, especially rough-and-tumble play. Household chores are usually divided according to gender, but mothers are more likely than fathers to encourage both their sons and daughters to take on chores that would usually be assigned to the other gender. These patterns of gender intensification increase as children get older (Galambos, 2004; Freeman, 2007). Fathers may be more traditional than mothers in their stereotypes, but both parents have strong convictions about which gender is better suited to which activities. Parents perceive the competencies of their children in areas such as math, English, and sports according to their children's gender, even if these influences are independent of any real differences in the talents or abilities of the children (Marmion and Lundberg-Love, 2004; Kline and Wilcox, 2013). Children may recognize the inequity in their parents' actions, but largely accept the behavior as gender appropriate. Parent-child similarity about gender attitudes carries throughout childhood and adolescence (Degner and Dalege, 2013). This acceptance of stereotypes is consistent with cognitive development theory by suggesting that the development of gender role identity is linked to children's perception of adult behavior.

Sons and Daughters Gender of parent does not predict the level of responsiveness—both parents respond swiftly and appropriately to the demands of their children—but it does predict the type of response. There are clear differences between men and women in gender role expectations concerning child rearing. Children of all ages spend more time with women than men. Girls do housework with mothers, and boys do yard work with fathers. Fathers spend more time with their sons and focus activities on instrumental learning—how to repair things, how to compete successfully in sports, and how to earn and manage money. Regardless of the child’s gender, mothers talk to their children, are emotionally expressive, and stay closer to them more than fathers. Both mothers and fathers expect riskier behavior from their sons and believe that there is little they can do to prevent it. Fathers believe that overprotecting their children, especially their sons, limits opportunities for physical risk-taking that is unproductive (Morrongiello and Hogg, 2004). Risk issues show up in messages about sex and sexuality. Both parents send their daughters more restrictive sex messages than they do their sons (Morgan et al., 2010; Brussoni and Olsen, 2012). Although mothers spend more overall time with their children than fathers, parental time spent with same-gender children is considered more productive in terms of socialization benefits (Gugl and Welling, 2012).

Today’s parents are much more likely to support beliefs about gender equity and feminist values than did their parents. A growing new generation of feminist parents is socializing the next generation of feminist children. Parents who are forerunners of change, however, face difficult obstacles. This ideological shift toward equity is more strongly supported by mothers than by fathers. Fathers have less support for gender equity when they have sons only, but more support when they have daughters only. Feminist fathers may lag behind feminist mothers because the fathers tap into the gender differences that were part of their own socialization experiences (Risman and Myers, 2006; Blakemore and Hill, 2008). According to symbolic interactionists, beliefs about equity cannot fully erase these early family influences. In addition, children from egalitarian households—whether their parents are defined as feminist or not—are continually exposed to patriarchal families outside their homes, especially in the media. Until egalitarian behavior becomes normative throughout all social institutions, a cultural lag persists (McCorry, 2006). On the other hand, we have seen that socialization is a powerful force serving both gender role continuity and gender role change. As beliefs about gender equity become more widespread, the next generation of parents should socialize their children in less traditional ways than they were socialized.

Peers and Preferences

Children transfer gender role patterns established in the family when they begin to form friendships with their peers. With family gender role models as a foundation, peer influence on children’s gender socialization is even more powerful. Parents initiate the first peer relationships for their children, with these often developing into later friendships chosen by the children themselves. Two- and three-year-olds delight in playing with their same-age companions, and parents are not compelled to separate them by gender at this early age. As school age approaches, however, this situation is altered dramatically.

Activities, games, and play are strongly related to gender roles and become important aspects of socialization. These are easily seen when a brother and sister play together. When Jane pressures Dick into playing house, she is the mommy and he is the daddy. Or she can convince him to be the student while she is the teacher and relishes the prospect of scolding him for his disruptive classroom behavior. On the other hand, if brother Dick coerces Jane into a game of catch, he bemoans her awkwardness and ridicules her lack of skill. What would social learning theory say about the likelihood of Jane becoming an expert in catch? Games such as these usually are short-lived, dissolve into conflict, and are dependent on the availability of same-gender peers with whom siblings would rather play.

Games Peer play activities socialize children in important ways. The games of boys are more complex, competitive, and rule-governed and allow for more positions to be played and a larger number of participants than games played by girls. Girls play ordered games such as hopscotch and jump rope in groups of two or three, which take up less space, minimize competitiveness, and tend to enhance cooperation. Both boys and girls play kickball, but boys play it at a younger age than girls and graduate to more competitive, physically demanding sports sooner than girls. There are significant consequences of gender differences in games and play. Girls prefer to socialize and talk at recess rather than engage in any physical activity, a pattern more pronounced with African American and Latino girls (Kim, 2008; Holmes, 2012). When girls are weaned from sports and physical activities in early childhood, they lose strength, are less interested in exercising, stay indoors, and watch television more than boys (Cherney and London, 2006). By adolescence, they show some loss in bone density and are at increased risk for obesity. An important early study of these effects bitterly concluded that girls' games "teach meaningless mumbo-jumbo—vague generalities or pregame mutual agreements about 'what we'll play'—while falsely implying that these blurry self-guides are typical of real world rules" (Harragan, 1977:49–50). Decades later the pattern still holds. Skipping rope is a shared activity for girls in smaller spaces on playgrounds that are dominated by boys who play soccer and basketball. Boys and girls are proud of these activities and seize opportunities to show them off to the other gender. Boys act out hegemonic masculinity in their sports skills, and girls demonstrate friendship and precision in their skipping skills (Martin, 2011).

Later research lends support to the notion that girls lose out in early skill development related to competition. Girls also may take longer to develop the ability to take on the roles of several people at once—referred to as the *generalized other* by symbolic interactionists—which is valuable in understanding group dynamics by anticipating how others will react in a given group situation. Complex games such as team sports require this ability. Yet this learning process may have negative effects for both girls and boys. The games of young boys do provide early guidelines that are helpful for success later in life, such as striving for individual excellence through competition as emphasized in American culture. However, boys may be at a disadvantage because it takes them longer than girls to learn values such as consensus building, cooperation, and intimacy, which are also essential for interpersonal and economic success.

Cognitive development and social learning theory highlight the importance of peers in fueling gender segregation during early childhood. With strong gender cognitions about similarity, peer group influence increases throughout the school years, exerting a powerful effect on children. As any playground in the world demonstrates, children quickly gravitate toward same-gender peers. When children interact, positive reinforcement for the behavior of same-gender peers occurs more frequently than with other-gender peers (Martin et al., 2011).

Young boys show stronger gender-typed preferences in activities when they are with peers than when alone (Goble et al., 2012). Boys are mocked by other boys for displaying fear or for crying when they are picked on and applauded when they are aggressive. Even with zero tolerance school policies about bullying and fighting, think about when boys fight or taunt other boys, their peers on the sidelines cheer and spur them on. Boys are more tenacious in their gender typical behavior and exhibit strong masculine stereotyped preferences through preadolescence. But boys must walk a fine line between openly displaying too much or not enough aggression (Kochel et al., 2012). Boys are more likely than girls to be expelled from school for aggressive behavior. Both gender-typical and gender-atypical behavior is risky for boys who are concerned with maintaining positive peer relationships. Children prefer to interact with other children who have the same style of play as their own. In preschool, gender segregation is enforced by peers but high-activity girls originally interact more in games with boys. Over time, gender resegregation occurs, but low-activity girls and high-activity girls interact in separate groups (Hoffmann and Powlishta, 2001; Pellegrini et al., 2007). Boys interact in larger groups and have more extensive but less communal peer relationships; girls interact in smaller groups and have more intensive and more communal peer relationships. Early intimacy with peers carries over to higher levels of self-disclosure and trust between women, especially best-friend pairs (Chapter 7). The trust and openness that enhance same-gender relationships could inhibit later cross-gender friendships. Gender boundaries are strictly monitored and enforced by peers in childhood, and the worlds of male and female are further divided. Because they learn different styles of interaction, when boys and girls meet as teenagers, they may do so as strangers.

Shifts in Gendered Peer Behavior Recent research suggests that the peer socialization experiences of girls and boys differ depending on type and context of the experience. Since girls are often rewarded for masculine activities, they are able to be more gender atypical in their activities. However, peer harassment, social exclusion, taunting, and name-calling are associated with withdrawal. Adolescents withdraw from both masculine activities (for example, sports) and feminine activities (for example, cheerleading). As expected from ample research, peer harassment of boys predicts fewer feminine activities. Boys with fewer male friends and many female friends experience more peer harassment, but surprisingly, gender-atypical (feminine) behavior increases rather than decreases. The more excluded boys are from other boys, the *less* they engage in masculine activities (Lee and Troop-Gordon, 2011a; 2011b). As we have seen in this chapter, boys and girls undergo different socialization processes for gender role development. These findings need to be incorporated in the theories to explain both the similarities and the differences.

School

Family life paves the way for education, the next major agent of continuing socialization. The intimacy and spontaneity of the family and early childhood peer groups are replaced with a school setting in which children are evaluated impersonally with rewards based on academic success. School will play a critical role in the lives of both parents and students for the next 12–20 years. We will view the gender impact of the educational institution fully in Chapter 11. The intent here is to briefly consider its role in primary socialization. Regardless of the mission to evaluate children impersonally—by what they do rather than who they are—schools are not immune to gender role stereotyping and often foster it.

Teachers who sincerely believe they are treating boys and girls similarly are unaware of how they inadvertently perpetuate sexist notions. When Jane is ignored or not reprimanded for disruptive behavior, is encouraged in her verbal but not mathematical abilities, or is given textbooks showing women and girls in a narrow range of roles—or not showing them at all—gender stereotyping is encouraged, and Jane's self-esteem and achievement motivation decrease (Skelton, 2006; Brown, 2008). Dick discovers that his rowdiness will gain attention from his female elementary school teacher, that he can aspire to any occupation except nurse or secretary, and that he is rewarded for his athletic skills at recess. Unlike Jane, who may be grudgingly admired when engaged in “tomboy” behavior, Dick is loath to even investigate school-related activities typical for girls, lest he be called a “sissy.” A decade of research on students of all grade levels conducted by Myra and David Sadker (1994) brings this point home. Their study asked: What would it be like to become a member of the “opposite sex”? Both boys and girls preferred their own gender, but girls found the prospect intriguing and interesting and were willing to try it for a while. As girls wrote, “I will be able to be almost anything I want” or “I will make more money now that I am a boy.” Boys, on the other hand, found it appalling, disgusting, and humiliating. Comments from two sixth-grade boys suggest the intensity of these feelings: “My teachers would treat me like a little hairy pig-headed girl” and at the extreme: “If I were turned into a girl today, I would kill myself” (Sadker and Sadker, 1994:83).

Functionalists emphasize the responsibility of schools to socialize children to eventually take on positions necessary to maintain society. Schools provide experiences that offer technical competence as well as the learning of values and norms appropriate to the culture. American culture places a high regard on the values of competition, initiative, independence, and individualism, and schools are expected to advocate these values. We have already seen how these values are associated more with masculinity than femininity. Also from a functionalist viewpoint, schools are indispensable in bringing together a diverse society through the acceptance of a common value system.

Unfortunately, many schools unwittingly socialize children into acquiring one set of values to the exclusion of the other. Stereotypical thinking assumes that to fill bread-winning roles, boys need to be taught the value of competitiveness and to fill domestic roles, girls need to be taught the value of nurturance. Although both are positive values and both are needed to function effectively, they are limited to, or truly accepted by, only one gender. As schools begin to foster gender-fairness in the curriculum and in school culture, gender role socialization harmful to both girls and boys can be altered.

Television

Television aimed at young children is a commanding source of gender socialization. This observation is empirically justified, considering that a child may spend up to one-third of the day watching TV. Heavy television viewing is strongly associated with traditional and stereotyped gender views. Children are especially vulnerable in believing that television images represent truth and reality. Television is by far the most influential of all the media. Television establishes standards of behavior, provides role models, and communicates expectations about all social life. Children are increasingly using messages from television to learn about gender and sexuality—a pattern found for both genders and for children of all races in the United States. When television images are reinforced by the other mass media, such as movies, magazines, and popular songs, the impact on socialization is profound (Chapter 13).

Television Teaches Strongly supportive of social learning theory, children as young as 2 years of age copy what they see on TV, with imitation increasing through the elementary school years. Television encourages modeling. Children identify with same-gender characters. Boys identify with physically strong characters, especially athletes and superheroes. Girls identify with beautiful models, girls who are popular and attractive in school, and plain girls who are transformed into lovely and rich princesses.

Television is gender stereotyped. Gender role portrayals in shows that are deemed acceptable for children are highly stereotyped. Even *Sesame Street*, arguably the most popular children's show for preschool children of all time, highly underrepresents female characters—human or Muppet—and portrays males more than females as dominant and in roles of authority. In cartoons for preadolescents, male characters outnumber female characters ten to one. Females are portrayed more in family roles and are more physically attractive and sexualized than male characters (*The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*). Cartoons usually have all males or have one or two females, often in helping or little sister relationships. Many of you may recall from your childhood the lone *Smurfette* among all of the other male *Smurfs*. When girls are portrayed with boys in dangerous situations, boys determine the story line and the code of values for the group. Girls are defined in relation to the boys. Television influences self-image. On Saturday morning TV, boys are more significant persons than girls, if only by the sheer number of male characters compared to female. This is bolstered by television's consistent and stubborn portrayal of stereotypical female characters, especially teenagers, existing primarily as add-ons to males (*SpongeBob*, *Phineas and Ferb*). It is interesting that children's programming that deviates from gender stereotypes is not only successful, but also hugely popular. Females are lead characters that are portrayed as heroic, smart, and adventurous; male and female characters are partners in adventures (*Dora the Explorer*, *Adventure Time*, *Doc McStuffins*; *Powerpuff Girls*). Although these are positive signs, *Dora* has taken on a more sexualized appearance, the *Powerpuff Girls*, alas, are still more puff than powerful, and it is difficult to find boys in roles that show caring and warmth. Factoring in race, young white boys are the largest beneficiaries in bolstering overall self-esteem from television programming for children.

Advertising Children’s television is supported by commercials aimed at products for children—mainly toys, fast food, and sugared cereal. In the early days of television, advertising for children’s items was targeted to adults. Today children are more likely than adults to actually watch the commercials. Marketing to the “child consumer” is a key tactic of the toy industry with age- and gender-linked ads designed to entice a specific niche of children (Pike and Jennings, 2005; Desmond and Carveth, 2007). Advertisers prompt children to believe that doing without these toys or other products is an unfortunate hardship. Commercials are blatant in creating desires for toys encouraging domesticity and passivity in girls and high activity in boys; girls play cooperatively, and boys play competitively and aggressively. Not only do these patterns show no sign of decreasing, but gender stereotypes are intensifying.

The entertainment industry has melded toys into television, and the child consumer it increasingly caters to is getting younger. Toy manufacturers such as Fisher-Price and producers of children’s programs such as Disney have joined in creating a “baby market” targeting the 0–3 age niche. This industry defines babies as “early learners” and markets products such as Baby Einstein as “educational” and “developmental” (Hughes, 2005). As social constructionism tells us, when these definitions are accepted, the product is approved as more than merely a toy. The fact that these toys are packaged and sold as “gender appropriate” is ignored.

Regardless of how gender stereotyped toys are, television succeeds in pressuring parents to buy “learning tools” that also are fun for their children. Those who resist the pressure to buy products or find that the products children want are unavailable are made to feel guilty by advertisers and children alike. Remember the frantic search for limited supplies of Cabbage Patch Kids, Power Rangers, and Tickle Me Elmo by parents who feared a disappointed child during holidays or on his or her birthday? Picture, too, the angry exchanges we have witnessed between a parent and child in front of the toy, candy, or cereal displays. Parents searching for nonstereotyped toy alternatives may feel demoralized when the offer of a tea set to their son or a truck to their daughter is met with resistance. Tantalized by television, the child’s desire is within reach. The desire is likely to be gender role–oriented. The parent stands in between. Who is likely to give up the fight first?

Socialization for Gender Equity

Socialization is neither consistent nor uniform. It occurs via diverse agents at the cultural and subcultural levels. Yet identifiable gender role patterns still emerge, and children are taught to behave in feminine or masculine ways. But major contradictions also arise in this process. Girls climb trees, excel in mathematics, and aspire to be surgeons and professors. These same girls are concerned about being physically attractive, being financially successful, finding the right husband, and raising a family. Boys enjoy cooking and babysitting and cry when they are hurt or sad. These same boys are concerned about being physically attractive, being financial successful, finding the right wife, and raising a family.

Androgyny

The socialization theories and research overviewed in this chapter strongly support the notion that views of masculinity and femininity need to shift in the direction of gender role flexibility. Such flexibility offers two important positive outcomes. First, gender roles appear to be more constraining rather than liberating for the human experience. Second, socialization toward gender flexibility paves the way to increased gender equity. Regardless of how the various theories explain gender socialization, it is quite clear that they all agree that masculine and feminine traits are changeable. What socialization options might offer paths to achieving this flexibility? Ideally, then, socialization toward gender flexibility paves the way to increased gender equity. If gender constrains rather than liberates the human experience, perhaps “gender role” is an outmoded concept.

The concept of **androgyny** refers to the integration of traits considered to be feminine with those considered to be masculine. Large numbers of people can be identified as androgynous on widely used scales to measure the concept. Both men and women can score high or low on either set of traits or have a combination of them. People not only accept their biological sex (being male or female) and have a strong sense of gender identity, but also acknowledge the benefits of gender role flexibility. Gendered behavior does not disappear, but we adapt it according to the various situations and contexts confronting us and at the same time act on our own talents and desires. Parents who are identified as androgynous are less stereotyped about masculinity and femininity and offer a wider range of behavioral and attitudinal possibilities to their children. Many of these are the forerunner parents to the feminist kids mentioned earlier.

Critique Although androgyny is an encouraging concept, it has moved out of favor as applied to socialization for several reasons. It suggests that people can be defined according to a range of gendered behaviors and then classified accordingly. This in itself is stereotypical thinking. Media-inspired popular conceptions stereotype the “androgynous man” as feminine and often portray him as weak or ineffectual. When a woman exhibits masculine traits, she is less likely to be portrayed negatively.” Androgyny is associated more with femininity than masculinity; thus, it lacks the envisioned positive integration of gender traits. It may be masculine-affirmative for women, but it is not feminine-affirmative for men. According to Sandra Bem, a pioneer in measuring androgyny, even if we define what is masculine and feminine according to our culture and subcultures, we need to stop projecting gender onto situations “irrelevant to genitalia” (Bem, 1985:222).

For parents and teachers to embrace a socialization model for gender equity enthusiastically, they must believe that feminine traits in boys are as valuable and prestigious as masculine traits in girls. Because of lurking stereotypes and the higher cultural value given to masculinity, an androgyny model for socialization has been less successful.

Gender-Neutral Socialization

Given the power of the gender binary that generally values masculine traits, some parents who want to break its constraints adopt a gender-neutral approach to socialization. It may be akin to the degendered model discussed in Chapter 1 that

considers “what if” children were not divided and, in this case, not raised according to gender?” (Lorber, 2005:7). Gender-neutral parenting may exist on a continuum, with androgyny as one pole.

Raising Baby X The other pole would be raising a “Baby X,” maintaining a genderless existence for the child, even by concealing the child’s gender from others for as long as possible. Lois Gould’s (1980) charming children’s story published in *Ms.* magazine represents this pole:

Once upon a time, a Baby named X was born. It was named X so that nobody could tell whether it was a boy or a girl. Its parents could tell, of course, but they couldn’t tell anybody else. They couldn’t even tell Baby X—at least not until much, much later. (p. 61)

The story revolves around how little X and its parents encountered and eventually overcame resistance from everyone who wanted to know what X was so that X could be treated as a boy or girl.

Raising a gender-neutral Baby X is virtually impossible. Parents cannot be gender blind as much as gender vigilant. They cannot ignore how gender roles seep into every aspect of our lives. A few examples, however, have surfaced in the media from Swedish, Canadian, and British couples who embraced such a parenting style as much as possible. These parents did not reveal their child’s gender except to a very few people. Couples mention they want their kids to be just kids and not force their children into a gender mold. Like Baby X, clothes and toys were neutral, but although the British parents banned Barbie and guns, toy and clothes, selections were child driven rather than parent driven (Alleyne, 2012; Leaper and Bigler, 2011; Weiss, 2012).

Parents as Innovators

Given the obstacles that parents face in gender-neutral parenting, a more pragmatic approach is demonstrated by parents who want to raise their children in less gendered ways but also account for their children’s preferences that may be more traditional. Referred to as “Innovators” in Emily Kane’s (2012) research on gender socialization, these parents promote crossing gender boundaries but also support “gender typical patterns.” Sons and daughter are offered a variety activities, toys, and games that do not assume traditional interests. It is difficult, however, for parents to determine if they are indirectly gendering. Is a daughter really expressing an interest in dolls, for example, or are parents instilling that interest on her behalf? (Kane, 2012:143). Innovative parents reject biological essentialism but largely accept their children’s preferences, whether traditional or nontraditional.

Critique Media reports notwithstanding, we know very little about the successes of gender-neutral socialization. In these cases, comments by a range of psychiatric and mental health experts mention the pitfalls related to the potential failure of these children to develop a sense of self and gender identity. Others voice ethical concerns about such parenting (Cutas and Giordano, 2013). It will take a generation to see if these children resurface as adults with painful or happy stories full of

the highs and lows that all children encounter as they grow up. In Kane's study, the innovators expressed concerns about accountability, gender identity, and essentialism, issues we discuss through this book. These parents recognize gender pitfalls for their children if they are raised traditionally, but are reluctant to deny these very traditions for their sons and daughters.

Androgyny, gender-neutral parenting, and the midrange of innovative parenting all recognize that children raised in two nonoverlapping gender roles is not productive in meeting the demands of a rapidly changing society. Nor do such roles offer the best options for fulfilling a person's human potential and individual desires. Efforts at even minimal degendering in agents of socialization have only recently emerged. Although such efforts are met with resistance, advantages are gradually making their way to a larger public audience. Consider this pronouncement when we view language and communication (Chapter 4), other powerful agents of socialization.

Baby X had a happy outcome. At the story's conclusion, Baby X emerges as a well-adjusted and popular child:

"X isn't one bit mixed up! As for being a misfit—ridiculous. X knows perfectly well what it is! Don't you, X?" The Xperts winked. X winked back. . . . Later that day, all X's friends put on their red and white checked overalls . . . and found X, in the backyard, playing with a very tiny baby that none of them had ever seen before. The baby was wearing very tiny red and white checked overalls. "How do you like our new baby?" X asked the Other Children proudly. "It's got cute dimples," said Jim. "It's got husky biceps, too," said Susie. . . . What "kind of baby is it? . . . Then X broke into a big, mischievous grin. . . . It's a Y! (Gould, 1980: 64)

Global Focus: Son Preference in Asia

Any decreasing son preference in the developed world does not predict its decline globally. Level of economic development is strongly associated with preference for sons. In regions where economic development is higher, such as in North America and Northern Europe, son preference appears to be weakening. In less developed regions, particularly throughout Asia, favoritism for sons is bolstered by the poverty of the couple, women's subordinate status, the low economic value given to the work women perform, religious beliefs, inheritance norms, and naming customs.

China

In China, where son preference is centuries old, a family name may be "lost" if there is no son to carry it on. Confucian practices related to ancestor worship, which trace the family name only through male lines, combine with marriage customs requiring newly married rural women to move into the household of their husbands and inheritance laws keeping women economically dependent on their new families. Low-income rural women express stronger son preference than urban women with incomes because sons provide for them in old age. Women are outsiders even after marriage, and women without sons may be abandoned by their in-laws if they are unable to carry out household tasks or farmwork. A daughter not only loses

her name at marriage, but also is viewed as a temporary commodity. The Chinese proverb “Raising a daughter is like weeding another man’s garden” attests to the strength of preference for sons.

East and South Asia

Son preference is pervasive globally, but it is strongest throughout East and South Asia, in developed countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea, and in developing countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Vietnam. It persists in rural and urban areas and among all religious faiths (Yu and Su, 2006). A major shift favoring males in the average *sex ratio at birth* (SRB) is growing throughout Asia. The worst SRB imbalances occur in poor, rural areas in China, India, and Bangladesh. SRB in India and Bangladesh has worsened over the last century, but in China, it has worsened over the last three decades, traced to the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979. The most extreme gender ratio for children under 4 in one Chinese port city is an astonishing 163 boys for every 100 girls (Hvistendahl, 2012). Consequences of this inflation for girls are profound. These include underreporting of female births, female infanticide, neglect of female infants and girls resulting in their premature death, and the use of fetal screening leading to sex-selective abortions of female fetuses (Chapters 2 and 6).

In India and Bangladesh, female infanticide and neglect are associated with the economic survival of the family, which is dependent on the number of sons and the control of the number of daughters, who are regarded as financial liabilities. Even immigrant women from India speak of physical and verbal abuse from husbands and in-laws when they did not have sons or were found to be carrying a female fetus. As in China, a rural woman generally moves to her husband’s household at marriage. She is expected to bring money and goods in the form of dowry to help offset the expenses associated with her upkeep. All daughters add to the financial burden. When dowries are considered too paltry, the bride may suffer emotional abuse or physical violence by her husband or in-laws, which may lead to her suicide. Even immigrant women from India have spoken of such abuse when they did not have sons or were found to be carrying a female fetus (Puri et al., 2011). Violence against women is increasing in India, and dowry abuse is a leading culprit.

Gendered Effects

In addition to the blatant human rights violations, the artificially inflated SRB has huge economic and social implications. Because women continue to have babies until they have a son, larger families consist mainly of girls and have higher poverty rates than smaller families, which consist mainly of boys. Although larger families are more likely to live in poverty overall, it is deepened when girls face lower pay than boys when they seek employment outside the home. This economic issue collides with social repercussions of a serious bride shortage in China, India, and Korea. “Bachelor villages” are growing at alarming rates, particularly in China and India. These are populated by young, jobless unmarried men and few unmarried

young women. China is estimated to have 50 million unhappy unmarried men, and the number is growing. This “surplus” restive population is being closely monitored by government authorities concerned about their potential for social and political unrest (Coonan, 2008).

It may appear that because women are viewed as objects—a commodity of exchange—the principle of scarcity would make them more valuable from a market perspective. The scarcity principle of supply and demand, which would put a premium on women, is not borne out by research. In Asian cultures where the SRB is highest and gender equity lowest, the scarcity of women is associated with selling and kidnapping of young girls and women, unmarried girls cloistered in their homes, and violence and domestic abuse by husbands and fathers. Fewer girls are available to care for the daily needs of infirm mothers and grandmothers, who usually outlive fathers and grandfathers. Because boys will soon shoulder more than the traditional financial responsibilities for their elders, elder abuse by sons is likely to increase as well.

Despite overall improvements in health care, education, and paid work for Asian women and fetal sex screening being outlawed in China and South Asia, son preference persists and has dire consequences for the well-being of females. Socialization practices regarding son preference in much of developing Asia are strong and growing. Given that these practices are in place for over half of the world’s population, efforts at economic development and poverty reduction are severely compromised.

Summary

1. Socialization is the process by which we learn culture and become functioning social members. Gender socialization tells us what is expected cultural behavior related to masculinity and femininity.
2. Gender role socialization in children is patterned by important cultural factors, especially race and social class. Middle-class parents are more flexible than working-class parents. Children from Latino and Asian American homes are generally socialized into less flexible gender roles than African American and white children.
3. Four major theories of gender socialization explain how children learn gender identity, an awareness of two sexes, and the behavior associated with them. Social learning theory focuses on the rewards and punishments for acting out appropriate gender roles. Cognitive development theory asserts that gender identity allows children to organize their behavior; once they learn gender identity, they choose their behavior accordingly. Gender schema theory, a subset of cognitive development theory, asserts that of all cognitive structures, or schemas, a child learns, gender is the core one around which information is organized. Social cognitive theory, the newest model, offers ways to integrate the other three theories by accounting for behavior in terms of imitation and observation, self-regulation and self-reflection.
4. Socialization, including gender socialization, occurs through specific agents—people, groups, social institutions—that provide children the information they

need to function in society. These agents are interdependent and often send inconsistent messages. The family, the most important agent, provides the child's first values and attitudes about gender.

5. Expectant parents in the United States usually state a son preference for a first or only child. However, college women and first-time pregnant women in the United States and Europe are more likely to state a daughter preference or no preference.
6. Gender of the child is a strong predictor of how parents behave toward their children and in the selection of the toys and clothes parents give to them. Boys are allowed more independence, separation, and risk-taking, and the toys they receive encourage these behaviors. Toys for girls encourage domesticity and social orientation. Girls have the advantage of playing with toys for boys, but boys cannot cross over and play with toys for girls.
7. The gender of a parent predicts gender role expectations in child rearing. Although today both mothers and fathers support beliefs about gender equity, the shift to these beliefs is much swifter for mothers.
8. Peer play activities are highly gendered. Boys play more complex competitive games in larger groups. The play of girls fosters cooperation, intimacy, and social skills. Peer groups monitor and enforce gender segregation.
9. Teachers are often unaware that they treat boy and girl children differently, such as encouraging more cooperation in girls and more competitiveness in boys. Gender socialization in schools often inhibits learning both of these necessary skills.
10. Television teaches children about gender in highly stereotyped ways. In cartoons, male characters outnumber female characters ten to one. In popular and acclaimed shows, males outnumber females and are in more dominant, important, and active roles. Commercials aimed at children reinforce these gender stereotypes, especially showing girls in domestic settings and boys in aggressive settings.
11. Socialization for gender equity includes androgyny, gender-neutral parenting, and innovative parents who reject essentialism but may accommodate their children's traditional choices. Androgyny is falling out of favor, and gender-neutral socialization is unrealistic. All approaches suggest that non-overlapping gender roles are not productive for both individuals and society.
12. Son preference has artificially inflated the sex ratio at birth throughout Asia. In China and East and South Asia, son preference is associated with abortion of female fetuses, dowry violence against women, and female infanticide, neglect, and abandonment.

Key Terms

Agents of socialization

Androgyny

Continuing socialization

Culture

Gender identity

Gender socialization

Primary socialization

Schemas

Self

Social control

Social Institutions

Socialization

Subcultures

Critical Thinking Questions

1. With reference to research on parental expectations for behavior, gender segregation, and peer play activities, explain patterns of gender socialization in early childhood from the perspectives of social learning and cognitive development. Which explanation better accounts for the research?
2. Through specific research examples, demonstrate how gender schema theory can help “bridge the gap” between sociological and psychological approaches to gender role socialization.
3. Based on your understanding of the theory and research on gender socialization, what suggestions would you offer to parents and teachers who want to socialize children into more androgynous and flexible gender roles? Demonstrate how your suggestions counter the negative gendered impact of agents of socialization.