Hilary M. Lips

Gender

the basics

GENDER

THE BASICS

Gender: The Basics is an engaging introduction which encourages the reader to pay attention to the impact of cultural, historical, biological, psychological and economic forces on the qualities which have come to be defined as masculine or feminine in particular contexts. Highlighting that there is far more to gender than biological sex, it takes a global perspective to examine the interaction between gender and topics including:

- Relationships, intimacy and concepts of sexuality
- The workplace and labor markets
- Gender-related violence and war
- Public health, poverty and development
- The aging process.

Supporting theory with a wide range of examples, suggestions for further reading and a detailed glossary, this text is an essential read for anyone approaching the study of gender for the first time.

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The Basics

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THE BASICS

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GENDER: EVERYBODY HAS/DOES ONE

Years ago, Ursula LeGuin (1969) described a fictional world in which there were no "women" or "men," but only individuals. Gender categories were absent from this society—except for a few days in each individual's monthly cycle when sexual desires became insistent and individuals became "female" or "male" for the time it took to establish a sexual relationship. Even then, no persistent biological or social tendency toward maleness or femaleness was established: one individual could be the father of some children and the mother of others.

My students are intrigued but discomfited by this fantasy. Most say they cannot imagine a world without gender categories. It would be boring, bland, they protest. Everyone would be the same; relationships would be uninteresting. And how would anyone decide who was supposed to do what? Most react with similar perplexity and stubbornness when I ask them to "imagine yourself as still 'you,' but as a different gender." They argue that they would not, could not, be the same person if they were a different gender—and anyway they would be unskilled and awkward at doing what the other gender is supposed to do.

These responses provide some clues to the pervasive importance of gender categories in our lives. They also suggest that we view gender not as a category that someone simply biologically "is" but

as something that individuals do or act out. So what exactly is gender?

GENDER AND SEX: IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Most of us are used to dividing people up into two categories: female and male. If pressed, we might say the distinction is based on simple biology: male and female individuals look different, have different reproductive organs. Women have breasts. Men can grow beards. A woman can get pregnant and give birth. A man can inseminate a woman—even against her will.

However, we also know that individual women and men vary a great deal in how close they are to society's ideals of femininity and masculinity. Apparently, simply being biologically female does not ensure that a person is "womanly," and being biologically male does not mean an individual is "manly." Some people who are clearly men are described as not very masculine; some women are termed unfeminine. This suggests that there is something more complicated going on than placing people into well-defined biological categories. In fact, with respect to these issues, there seem to be two dimensions on which individuals might be categorized: biological and socio-cultural.

In recognition of these two dimensions, people who study the differences and similarities between women and men have sometimes made a distinction between sex and gender. They may use the term *sex* to refer to biological femaleness and maleness, and the term *gender* to refer to culturally-mediated expectations and roles associated with masculinity and femininity (e.g. Unger 1979). Although this is the general approach that will be followed in this book, it must be acknowledged that the biological and social dimensions that define women and men cannot be cleanly separated. Social expectations for femininity, for example, are shaped in some ways by the biological fact that women can become pregnant. Men's biologically-based propensity to have larger, stronger bodies is enhanced by social norms that encourage men to work at becoming strong and reward them for doing so. Thus sex and gender are intertwined, and it is usually impossible to separate them completely. Furthermore, gender itself is multidimensional. One dimension is *gender identity*: thinking of

oneself as male or female. Another is *gender role*: behaving in ways considered appropriate for women or men in the surrounding culture. Still another is *sexual orientation*: attraction to members of one's own and/or other genders.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF IDEAS ABOUT GENDER

History is filled with pronouncements about the nature of, and differences between, women and men. Recently, for example, Nobel-prize-winning author V.S. Naipaul opined to an interviewer that no woman could be his equal as a writer because of women's "sentimentality, the narrow view of the world" (Fallon 2011). Such comments have roots in a long tradition of theories about differences between women and men, some centered on the notion of women as deficient or incompletely developed human beings, and some based on the idea of men and women as complementary—but relatively equal—opposites. Proponents of the "deficiency" view have included Western philosophers, theologians, and scientists, including Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Sigmund Freud. Advocates of the complementary opposites view have included early medical researchers who viewed female and male reproductive organs as being the same except "inside out;" Chinese philosophers who conceived of two complementary energies as "yin" (darkness, coldness, femininity) and "yang" (heat, brightness, masculinity) and taught that they should be properly balanced in each person; and a variety of theorists—from Carl Jung to present-day psychologists—who have explicated the concept of androgyny: the joining of masculine and feminine qualities in a single individual. Of course, the hierarchical and complementary approaches can overlap, as in cases where people argue that women have special qualities (such as unselfishness) that complement those of men but are not competent enough or tough enough to be placed in leadership positions.

Some specific types of theories about gender are at least somewhat familiar to most people. For example, *psychoanalytic theory*, developed by Sigmund Freud (1960/1924), is often linked to his controversial idea that "anatomy is destiny." He postulated

that children learn to identify with their gender through complicated childhood processes centering on their response to having or not having a penis. This process, in which three- to five-year-old children of both sexes attach a high value to the possession of a penis, so that boys learn to fear castration and girls develop "penis envy," was said by Freud to result in feminine or masculine identification. Boys, according to his theory, suppress their early attraction to their mothers and identify with their fathers because they fear their fathers will see them as rivals and castrate them. Girls identify with their mothers as a kind of resigned, fall-back strategy: they realize they can't have a penis of their own, so they hope they can instead attract a man and have a male child.

Also controversial are theories about gender that are grounded in *evolutionary psychology*. Such theories posit that every species, including humans, changes over time as a result of genetic changes that are passed along across generations. Qualities that enhance the likelihood of survival are more likely to be passed on because individuals who have them are more likely to grow to maturity, find a mate, and reproduce. This approach argues that some qualities that are relevant to reproductive success are different for males and females, and they locate female–male differences in the different mating strategies that favor women's and men's reproductive success. For instance, this approach suggests that because men have millions of sperm, their best bet for reproducing their genes is to scatter them as far as possible by mating with many different women. Women, on the other hand, have to devote a lot of time and energy to each pregnancy and birth, so they maximize their chances of passing on their genes by being careful and selective in choosing a mate. So men have evolved to be promiscuous and women to be selective.

A third category of theories of gender involve various aspects of *socialization*. These approaches emphasize that children learn from their culture to identify as male or female and how to behave in masculine or feminine ways. Such lessons may be directly taught by parents, teachers, or peers, or simply absorbed through observation. The theories tend to assume that conformity to expectations about being feminine or masculine is motivated by individuals' desire to "fit in" and to be socially competent.

Finally, there are **social–cultural theories** that focus on how women's and men's behavior is shaped by the way power is distributed in the broader culture. These theories posit that, because so many cultures assign higher status and power to men, behavior associated with masculinity tends to be powerful behavior and feminine behavior tends to be powerless behavior. Such approaches focus not on anatomy, biology or learning, but on the direct impact of the social–cultural environment on women's and men's behavior.

IS GENDER "BUILT-IN," OR DO WE CONSTRUCT IT?

As this brief overview of theoretical approaches shows, one key to the arguments surrounding gender is the debate about how strongly it is rooted in biology. Do our bodies predispose us to be, feel, and behave differently as males and females? How much are such differences affected by the way we are raised, by the culture in which we grow up? This nature vs. nurture question is one that has haunted researchers who study every aspect of human behavior; however, it is particularly perplexing and complicated in the realm of gender. And the more we explore the role of nature and nurture, the more we confront the conclusion that virtually nothing in gender development is the result of only one or the other of these forces. Nature and nurture cannot be separated: they are intertwined and work together at every stage of human development. Thus, most people who have studied these issues deeply claim an interactionist position: they do not argue about *how much* nature or nurture influences particular aspects of development, but try instead to figure out *how* the two sets of influences interact to produce certain results.

THE ROLE OF BIOLOGY

The steps in human sexual differentiation

The path to joining the category male or female begins at conception. Through a series of developmental steps, a fertilized egg moves toward developing a body that will be classified as male or female:

- *Step 1: Chromosomes*   When sperm meets egg to produce fertilization, each normally contributes a set of 23 chromosomes, which pair up to form the genetic basis for the new individual. The 23rd pair, known as the sex chromosomes, is the pair that initially determines sex. Normally, this pair will be comprised of an X chromosome contributed by the mother's egg and either an X or Y chromosome contributed by the father's sperm. If the pair is XX, the pattern of development is predisposed to be female; if it is XY, the pattern is predisposed to be male. If some unusual combination, such as XO or XXX occurs, development tends to proceed in a female direction— as long as no Y chromosome is present. Only the sperm, not the egg, can contribute a Y chromosome. Thus the genetic basis of sex is determined by the father.
- *Step 2: Gonads*   During the first seven weeks after conception, the embryo develops a "neutral" gonad (sex gland) and the beginnings of both female and male sets of internal reproductive structures. Up until this point, the embryo has the potential to go either way, to develop either female or male reproductive equipment. In the eighth week, if a Y chromosome is present, it promotes the organization of the neutral gonad into an embryonic testis. If there is no Y chromosome, the neutral gonad will start to become an ovary.
- *Step 3: Hormones*   Once formed, the testes or ovaries begin to secrete sex hormones, and these hormones influence the remaining steps in sexual differentiation. Testes secrete both testosterone, which influences the male reproductive tract to develop, and Mullerian Inhibiting Substance (MIS), which causes the female reproductive tract to atrophy and disappear. Ovaries secrete estrogens and progesterone, which organize the development of the female reproductive system.
- *Step 4: Internal Reproductive Tract*   Over the next four weeks, the sex hormones gradually organize the internal reproductive structures in a male or female direction. Under the influence of testosterone, these internal ducts become the vas deferens, epididymis, seminal vesicles, urethra, and prostate. If no significant amount of testosterone is present, the internal structures differentiate in a female direction: as fallopian tubes, uterus, and vagina.

- *Step 5: External Genitalia*   Also by the end of the 12th week, the external genitalia, which are indistinguishable by sex at 8 weeks, have been influenced by the sex hormones to differentiate as either male or female. Under the influence of testosterone, the "neutral" genitalia develop into a penis and scrotum; without the influence of testosterone, the genitalia develop as a clitoris and labia.

A careful reader may have noticed an overall pattern in these steps: at each stage, without the effect of a Y chromosome or male sex hormone, development apparently proceeds in a female direction. This is true in other mammals too. Some biologists like to say that the basic pattern of mammalian development appears to be female—unless testosterone interferes.

Although we tend to think of female and male as two distinct, non-overlapping categories, the fact that sex develops through a series of sequential steps shows that there are some possibilities for these categories to be fuzzy. If, for example, a genetic male (XY) reaches step 3, in which testosterone is being secreted, but happens to have an inherited condition (androgen insensitivity syndrome) that makes cells unable to respond to testosterone, step 4 will not proceed in a male developmental direction. At birth, the baby will probably appear female and be classified as such; the male genetic configuration and testes may well not be discovered until young adulthood. There are a variety of ways in which the steps of sexual differentiation may be inconsistent, producing an individual whose indicators of biological sex are mixed. Such intersexed individuals make up between 1 and 4 percent of the population.

There are two other aspects of the journey toward maleness or femaleness that appear even more complex than the development of a body that can be classified as male or female. One concerns the sexual differentiation of the brain. The other concerns the different ways in which individuals are treated and taught, once they have been classified as female or male.

Female brains and male brains?

If different levels of prenatal hormones can affect the development of internal and external genitalia, might they not also affect the

developing brain—producing different kinds of brains in females and males? In recent decades, a number of popular books and articles have argued that women and men think and behave differently because their brains are different. In general terms, this notion is not new. Late in the nineteenth century, women were said to be intellectually inferior to men because they had smaller brains. When it was demonstrated that women's brains were proportionately larger than men's by weight, the argument shifted to the size of particular areas of the brain—first the frontal lobes, then, when that proved untenable, the parietal lobes—that were said to be smaller in women. More recently, researchers have examined the size and shape of various brain structures in women and men and have found some evidence for sex differences, for instance in the corpus callosum (the structure that connects the right and left hemispheres of the brain). Since there is a tremendous amount of individual variation in brain size and shape, it can be very difficult to draw definitive conclusions about sex differences in brain morphology. Furthermore, it is not clear what functional significance these differences may have. Finally, it is uncertain whether the differences are "built in" or are the results of different life experiences—since it is acknowledged that brains are very plastic and responsive to experience.

The complexity of the issues are illustrated in the story of one set of researchers (Wood *et al.* 2008) who set out to find a brain difference that would mesh with the often-reported finding that women show more interpersonal awareness than men. After using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to examine the brains of 30 women and 30 men matched on age and IQ, they concluded that one particular brain structure, the straight gyrus (SG)—part of a brain region that had already been linked to the ability to interpret nonverbal cues—was proportionately larger in women than men. Furthermore, size of the SG was correlated with scores on a test of interpersonal perception. So far, this may sound like a clear case of sex differences in brain structure causing sex differences in a particular ability. It turns out not to be so simple, however. In this study, both the size of the SG and the interpersonal perception scores were also correlated with a third variable: respondents' scores on a measure of psychological femininity and masculinity. Respondents (both female and male) who described themselves

as having more "feminine" qualities tended to have larger SGs *and* higher interpersonal perception scores. Furthermore, a subsequent study that examined the brains of children aged 7 to 17 found a surprising result: the SG was larger in boys than girls, and interpersonal awareness scores were associated with smaller, not larger, SGs (Wood, Murko and Nopoulos 2009). In this younger sample, both higher interpersonal awareness and smaller SGs were associated with higher scores on psychological femininity. This complicated set of findings illustrates how perilous it can be to try to draw sweeping conclusions about sex differences in the brain and their relationship to female–male differences in behavior. It suggests, for example, the possibility that children's experiences as boys or girls may affect brain development. It leaves us wondering whether women's larger SGs come from many years of being socially sensitive, or whether their social sensitivity stems from their larger SGs—or whether both things may be true.

Another current research emphasis is on exploring possible sex differences in the ways various cognitive abilities may be organized within the brain. This is not something that can be discerned from examining brains directly; rather, researchers ask respondents to perform specific tasks, such as reading, listening, and recognizing objects, and they use various methods to determine which part of the brain is being activated and used to accomplish these tasks. Using this approach, some investigators have found results consistent with the idea that women and men may differ in the ways basic abilities, such as language, are distributed across the two hemispheres of the brain or among the different areas within hemispheres. The findings often involve small differences, are complex and often contested, so it is not possible to sum them up in brief generalizations. This complexity has not stopped media commentators from trumpeting misleading headlines such as "Women are significantly more right-brained than men."

If there were differences in the ways female and male brains were organized, how might this occur? For some decades, there have been efforts to understand the extent to which prenatal hormones might be involved and might organize the developing brain in ways that produce average differences between girls and boys in certain interests and social behaviors. This too is a complicated area, but a reasonable amount of evidence suggests

that levels of prenatal androgens are associated with later levels of certain kinds of interests (e.g. interest in babies) and behaviors (e.g. rough and tumble play) which are more strongly associated with one gender than the other. For example, one study measured testosterone levels in amniotic fluid (the fluid that surrounds the fetus in the womb), and tested the association between those levels and the levels of masculine-typical play, measured when the children were aged 6 to 10 years (Auyeung *et al*. 2009). For both boys and girls, parents reported more masculine-typical activities and interests for children whose samples of amniotic fluid *in utero* had shown higher levels of testosterone. The association between prenatal hormone levels and later behavior does not prove definitively that one causes the other. However, this and other studies have been used to suggest that prenatal concentrations of sex hormones may contribute to female–male behavioral differences, and that, to the extent that hormones are responsible for these differences, they may also be responsible for the large individual differences in such qualities *among* both girls and boys.

When we learn about scientific findings of differences in the brains of men and women in any particular sample—findings that involve sophisticated techniques such as neuroimaging—it is tempting to conclude that something really definitive has been proven about brain sex differences. However, experts caution that it would be wise to remain skeptical. For one thing, neuroimaging results can be affected by extraneous variables such as breathing rates or caffeine intake—a problem if samples are small. For another, it can be difficult to interpret the functional significance of differences in the size of brain structures or of more or less activation of a certain area of the brain. And if scientists are trying to link brain differences to behavior that is "feminine" or "masculine," they have to define what behaviors fall into these categories—a daunting and controversial task.

The role of biology in producing gender-related behavior is complex and fascinating; we have only scratched the surface of it here, and much more research remains to be done. However, biology always works in interaction with the environment, and that interaction is always a "work in progress" as each individual develops. As one eminent group of reviewers recently noted (Berenbaum, Blakemore and Beltz 2011: 814),

biology is not destiny. Genes are activated or suppressed by environmental factors. Hormones and brain functioning are almost certainly influenced by the different environments in which girls and boys are raised, by their different behaviors, and by joint effects of genes and the social environment.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE

Socialization: learning to be gendered

By the age of 6 months, infants can distinguish women's from men's voices; by nine months, most can discriminate between photographs of men and women—and sometime between the ages of 11 months and 14 months, they show the ability to accurately pair women's voices with pictures of women and men's voices with pictures of men (Martin and Ruble 2004). Clearly, children learn very early of the existence of gender categories and quickly become competent at figuring out who fits into which category.

Not only do children figure out these categories very early, they also quickly become adept at associating activities and items with the appropriate gender. By the middle of their second year, infants reliably look at a female face when presented with images of items such as ribbons and dresses, and at a male face when presented with pictures of things such as fire hats and hammers (Eichstedt *et al.* 2002). And by this age too, children have learned to link more metaphorical, abstract qualities with gender. Infants in this same study associated bears, fir trees, and navy blue with men, and hearts, cats, and bright pink with women. Children are unlikely to have seen all these items with women and men (for example, most infants will not have seen men with bears); however, they may have learned to connect the attributes of these things with gender. For example, a bear may be seen as strong and fierce; a cat may be seen as soft and quiet. Even very young children have absorbed the message that these characteristics are linked to gender.

How do children arrive at these conclusions? On the one hand, according to psychologists, they respond to instructions, rewards and punishments from people such as parents, teachers, and peers,

who let them know how to act as girls or boys and try to shape their behavior to fit expectations for the appropriate gender categories. A boy may be praised for acting "like a little man;" a girl may reap approval for behaving "just like Mommy." Peers may tease a boy for "throwing like a girl"; teachers may criticize a girl for being "unladylike." To cultivate approval and avoid criticism, children bring their behavior into line with the gendered expectations communicated to them. But on the other hand, children do not simply react to rewards and punishments; they are not mere putty in the hands of socializing agents. On the contrary, it now seems clear that children are active searchers for cues about how to behave in gender-appropriate ways.

According to cognitive theories of gender development, once children figure out that there are two gender groups and that they belong to one of them, there are some important consequences. For one thing, they begin to evaluate their own group as better than the other group: children as young as 3 years old like their own gender group more, attribute more positive qualities to members of that group, and show a strong preference for same-gender playmates. They also appear to be more interested in information about their own group, and tend to use gender stereotypes to form impressions of others. They do not seem to need much of a push to conform to gendered expectations; rather, they seem to be motivated to learn as much as they can about this important social category—gender— which is so important to their social identity. Thus the instructions, the presence of adult or peer models who can be imitated, rewards, and punishments are all used by children as sources of guidance to doing the best possible job of fitting into the "girl" or "boy" category. In fact, children become quite rigid for a while as they try to work this out. During early childhood, children try to consolidate their knowledge about gender into hard and fast categories; these categories can be very inflexible, particularly between the ages of 5 and 7 years. In this period, children are prone to make quick and strong judgments about people based solely on gender, and they are likely to be "sure" that women and men can't do certain things (Martin and Ruble 2004). After the age of 7 children tend to relax the categories a little and become more flexible.

Socialization does not end with childhood, however. It is a continuing process, affecting the ways individuals understand and enact gender at each life stage. As children approach adolescence, they fall more and more under the influence of peers and less under the influence of parents. Older children and adolescents who are not "typical" for their gender often feel pressure from their peers to conform to gender norms; when this happens, they are vulnerable to low self-esteem and depression. On the other hand, adolescents who view themselves as gender-atypical but feel accepted by their peers are less likely to face such difficulties. Through the media, children, adolescents and adults are presented with a continuous stream of gendered expectations and models to imitate. One study, for example, examined the portrayals of male and female characters in 101 top-grossing US films across the 15-year period from 1990 to 2005 (S.L. Smith *et al.* 2010). They found that male characters outnumbered females 2.57 to 1—a ratio that had not changed over the 15 years. They also found that female characters were more likely than males to be depicted as young, as parents, and as being in a married or committed relationship. Males were more likely than females to be portrayed as strong and funny; females were more likely to be presented as physically attractive. Both male and female characters were likely to be depicted in gender-traditional occupations. Another study (Paek, Nelson and Vilela 2011), which examined gender portrayals in television advertising across seven countries, found that males were reliably shown in more prominent visual and auditory roles than females, and that both women and men were used to advertise gender-typed products. In general, research shows that in television programs and commercials, video games, and popular films, whether created for children, adolescents or adults, male characters are portrayed more often than females and gender stereotypes are very common (Collins 2011). We swim in a cultural sea of gendered images and, at every stage, a desire to "fit in" pushes individuals to conform to those images.

The influence of the gender hierarchy

It may appear that gender socialization involves fitting people into a fairly arbitrary division of activities and qualities labeled

masculine and feminine. Indeed, a look at varying gender prescriptions across cultures or historical eras does suggest a strong streak of arbitrariness: in some cultures, men wear long, flowing garments as a matter of course, but in some the idea of a man in a "dress" is viewed with alarm; in some cultures, men who are good friends walk down the street holding hands, but in others that behavior is considered a violation of masculinity norms; there was a time in North America when the now-familiar mantra that "pink is for girls, blue is for boys" was reversed and pink was considered a strong, "masculine" color.

However, not all gender prescriptions are arbitrary. Many, in fact, help maintain a hierarchy in which men hold more power than women. If we consider the behaviors, personal qualities, and appearance that are considered desirable for men, many involve strength, dominance, and leadership; those considered desirable for women encompass delicacy, flexibility, and agreeableness—and a willingness to bend to a situation rather than take charge. A man often demonstrates his masculinity by wielding power; a woman can often indicate her femininity by behaving submissively. Thus, when people violate gender norms, they are sometimes also challenging the gender hierarchy.

For example, traditional gender roles tend to be entwined with the kinds of work women and men do. The expectation that women will be warm and nurturing means that they are considered a good fit for jobs or tasks that emphasize caretaking and supporting others. The expectation that men will be achievement-oriented and assertive implies that they will be viewed as good candidates for positions that involve taking charge and making decisions. Alice Eagly's (1987) *social roles theory* proposed that women are expected to be warm and compassionate and men to be tough and decisive *because* they are so often observed performing roles that require these very qualities. The gendered division of labor is both based on, and gives credibility to, gender stereotypes. Furthermore, Eagly argued, the requirements of the roles reinforce these qualities: women in "feminine" roles have more opportunity to practice compassion and so develop in that direction; men in "masculine" roles have more scope for decisiveness and so become more used to such behavior and better at it. So gender stereotypes reproduce themselves: people are selected for roles congruent with gender

stereotypes, and they learn to perform the requirements of these roles, thus enacting the gender stereotypes and helping to maintain both the stereotypes and the gendered division of labor. In maintaining the gendered division of labor, this circular process also maintains the gender hierarchy, since roles requiring masculine-stereotyped qualities such as leadership abilities are almost guaranteed to involve more status and higher pay than those requiring feminine-stereotyped qualities such as warmth and flexibility.

Another approach, *social dominance theory* (Pratto and Walker 2004), suggests that in societies that emphasize hierarchical social arrangements, the values toward which men are socialized and encouraged are hierarchy-enhancing—values that emphasize the promotion of the interests of powerful groups. Women, on the other hand, are encouraged to adopt hierarchy-attenuating values—values that stress equality and minimizing intergroup status and power differences. The expectation that women and men will hold different values promotes their perceived suitability for different kinds of occupational roles: men for roles that involve wielding power and influence, women for roles that involve supporting and empowering others. Indeed, even a cursory examination of labor statistics in Western countries indicates that men are far more likely than women to be in powerful, high-status positions such as corporate, professional, and political leadership, whereas positions such as social worker, counselor, secretary, and nurse, which involve helping and supporting others, tend to be dominated by women.

Gender stereotypes and roles, then, represent more than the expression of biologically-based sex differences and more than an accidental or random division by societies of qualities and behaviors into "feminine" and "masculine". They are expressions of cultural values, social constructions that help to organize behavior and maintain a society's power structures. And since gender is socially constructed, there is room for variation in the ways it is defined.

Multiple genders?

Cultures differ in their accommodation of individuals who are uncomfortable with the gender assigned to them or who do not

fit neatly into either the feminine or masculine gender. Among many Native American groups, for example, there is a tradition of categorizing such individuals as "two-spirit" people. Two-spirited people may be individuals with male bodies who identify and live as women, people with female bodies who identify and live as men, individuals of either sex who are sexually attracted to same-sex others, or anyone who lives outside the traditional definitions of gender and combines elements of both female and male genders. Having two spirits has traditionally been considered a special gift in these cultures. Two-spirited persons have been respected and, in some groups, given special roles in religious ceremonies.

The Americas are not the only place where exceptions to a simple two-gender system have been allowed. In some parts of Polynesia, for example, a category called *mahu* incorporates male-bodied individuals who adopt a feminine appearance and perform women's work. In India, the *hjiras* are male-to-female transgendered people who belong to a religious sect devoted to a particular goddess. They are often called upon to provide blessings at ceremonies such as weddings and births. Some researchers define two-spirit people, mahu, hjiras, and other similar groups as separate gender categories, referring to them as a *third gender*. They argue that such a label is appropriate, since these individuals are not completely incorporated into either the female or male gender, but live by a separate set of rules and expectations. It is probably too simplistic to categorize all these groups in the same way, given the many differences among them. However, the notion that gender categories need not be limited to male and female underlines the idea that gender is a social construction, maintained by agreement among members of a culture.

GENDER IDENTITY

Early in the chapter, we considered the difficulty of imagining oneself as a member of a different gender. For most people, this is quite difficult. Gender identity, the powerful conviction that one is female or male, is apparently developed very early in life. What is responsible for this conviction? Do children simply accept the category into which they are told they belong? Do they try to

figure out which category is the "best"? Are there biological underpinnings to gender identity? One thing we know with certainty is that there are limits to the extent children will passively accept their assignment to a gender category. In one very famous case, a young boy's penis was destroyed in a circumcision accident when he was only 7 months old (Diamond and Sigmundson 1997). Following what they thought was the best expert advice, this child's parents decided to raise him as a girl. Starting at the age of 17 months, "John" became "Joan." This child had an identical twin brother, and, for the first few years, the doctor supervising his case wrote optimistic descriptions of how the two children were developing: one as a traditional masculine boy and the other (reassigned) as a well-adjusted, feminine girl. The case was offered as proof of the malleability of gender identity in individuals younger than 24 months: at such an early age, it was said, a child would adopt the gender identity s/he was given, regardless of biological factors.

However, this case did not turn out well. As a young teenager, "Joan," who, according to her family, had never been happy as a girl despite their best efforts to support that identity and to socialize her in a feminine direction, discovered the truth about her history and demanded to reclaim a masculine gender identity. He went through genital surgery, adopted a masculine name, and began living life as a young man. Eventually, he married and became the father of an adopted family. He spoke up about his experience, in an attempt to protect other children from what he viewed as tragic manipulation by the medical community. Yet he remained troubled for the rest of his life, and later committed suicide.

Supporting the notion that gender identity is fixed very early and not easy to change are the first-person accounts of many *transgendered people*: individuals whose gender identity does not match their body's configuration. Most of the people who have written about this experience report that they became aware in early childhood that their bodies did not match their inner conviction about their gender—and that they found it impossible to change that inner conviction despite considerable external pressure. One therapist who collected such narratives reported that 85 percent of her clients recognized before they entered

grade school that their gender identities and their bodies were discrepant (Brown and Rounsley 1996).

If an awareness of a mismatch between inner identity and bodily form occurs so early and is so intractable, might there be some neurobiological dimension to gender identity? There is some limited research suggesting differences between one small aspect of the brains of transgendered and non-transgendered individuals (e.g. Kruijver *et al*. 2000), but samples are small, and conclusions based only on correlations. As yet, there is no definitive proof that such differences are routinely present or that they *cause* variations in gender identity. It is reasonable to assume, however, that biology and environment interact in complicated processes to produce gender identity—and that the details are simply not yet fully understood.

Adding to the complexity are reports suggesting that, under some circumstances, gender identity has proven to be flexible. In one case, a male child who was the victim of a surgical accident to his penis at the age of two months was reassigned as female at the age of seven months. That individual, who has since been followed up as an adult, apparently successfully adopted a feminine gender identity (Bradley *et al*. 1998). The researchers speculate that her successful transition to a feminine gender identity is due to the early age (seven months) at which she was reassigned, in contrast to the later age (17 months) in the unsuccessful case described above. In another set of cases, children in the Dominican Republic born with male (XY) genetic configurations and ambiguous genitalia were raised as girls, but then were found to change to a masculine gender identity at puberty when male secondary sex characteristics developed (see Imperato-McGinley *et al*. 1979). In these cases, some researchers argue, the children's early gender identity was not "set" as female because their ambiguous genitalia caused them to be recognized in their community as members of a special category: "first woman, then man." Thus, the way was paved for them to slip easily from a feminine to a masculine gender identity.

Clearly, the causes, processes, and timing of the formation of core gender identity are still in need of clarification. Research tells us that it usually solidifies very early and that it is almost impossible, once that happens, to "convince" an individual that it

should be changed. Yet there is more to gender than that basic, private experience of belonging to a gender category. The ways in which that category is defined and expressed can vary a great deal across social and cultural environments.

GENDER AND OTHER CATEGORIES

Some years ago, two researchers (Sugihara and Katsurada 1999) asked a group of Japanese college students to complete the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), a test often used in North America to assess psychological masculinity and femininity. In North American samples, men usually score as more "masculine" and women as more "feminine" on this measure, meaning that men tend to describe themselves as more like the US men and women as more like the US women on whom the test was developed. For Japanese students, however, these differences did not appear. There were no differences between Japanese women and Japanese men on either the Masculinity or Femininity scales of the BSRI, and both genders scored higher on the Femininity scale than on the Masculinity scale. The authors note that traits desirable for women and men in Japan may be different from those thought desirable in American culture, and they comment that "Japanese have described the 'ideal' woman as 'Yamato-nadeshiko' which represents a gentle and quiet female with internal strength," and that the ideal man is someone with "internal strength rather than physical strength" (p. 645).

Clearly, the ideals and norms for femininity and masculinity are not the same across all cultures. Research also shows that even within cultures, racial and ethnic identities intersect with gender norms. For example, one researcher (Tabar 2007) reports on a cultural category of ethnicised masculinity, labeled *habiib*, among second-generation Lebanese-Australian youths. The term *habiib* emphasizes not only a sense of kinship and shared experience among young Australian men of Lebanese ancestry, but also, according to Tabar's informants, "a hypersexualised masculinity with a particular style of dressing, posturing and even speaking."

Gender norms, stereotypes and roles also intersect with factors such as age, social class, sexual orientation, and ability/disability. For example, there is evidence from several sources that women

develop more confidence and power as they move into middle age. Research also shows that gender stereotypes are different for women of low and middle social class. We will explore these intersections further in later chapters.

THE EMPHASIS ON DIFFERENCES

Sometimes the entire focus of inquiries into gender and sex seems to be on defining the differences between categories. Perhaps this is not surprising; academic researchers know that one sure way to get findings published is to show a "significant" difference between two groups. Indeed, "no-difference" findings often languish, unpublished and unrecognized, in academic file cabinets.

The issue of difference is a loaded one, however: in many times and places, women have been excluded from occupations and from participation in aspects of public life *because* of presumed differences from men that made them unsuitable for such activities. Thus researchers oriented toward gender equality have often focused on showing that women and men do *not* differ on important abilities and temperamental qualities.

But might an emphasis only on debunking differences cause us to miss some important issues? Whereas a focus only on illustrating differences may solidify gender stereotypes and uphold the status quo, a focus only on showing similarities might result in the glossing over of important issues such as differences among women and men of different cultures, ethnicities, racial identities, sexualities, ages, and social classes; the different resources and sources of power available to women and men; or the different needs of women and men with respect to biologically-connected issues such as health, reproduction, and longevity.

Clearly, a single-minded emphasis on either differences or similarities is likely to miss something important. Canadian researcher Meredith Kimball (1995) has argued that it is important not to choose one emphasis over the other, but instead to practice "double visions," engaging the tension between the two approaches. Maintaining this perspective is difficult, but it is more consistent with the complexities of women's and men's lives and the ways they entwine and connect. In the next chapter, as we excavate the assumptions and ideas underlying gender stereotypes

and prejudice, we will repeatedly run up against this tension between seeing similarities and seeing differences.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Blakemore, Judith E. O., Berenbaum, Sheri A. and Liben, Lynn S. (2009). *Gender Development*. (New York: Psychology Press, Taylor and Francis Group.) This detailed yet reader-friendly book provides a fascinating and balanced look at different aspects of the development of gender. Chapters on the history of the field and on biological, social and cognitive approaches to understanding how gender takes shape will leave the reader well-informed.

Boylan, Jennifer (2003). *She's Not There: a life in two genders*. (New York: Broadway Books.) This lively and personal book is one of several interesting autobiographies of individuals who have transitioned as adults to a different gender.

Colapinto, John (2001). *As Nature Made Him: the boy who was raised as a girl*. (New York: HarperCollins.) A journalist tells the fascinating story of the famous "John/Joan" case.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne (2000). *Sexing the Body: gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. (New York: Basic Books.) A biologist uses her expertise to warn against over-simplified interpretations of research on biological sex differences. Among the controversies she takes up are the idea that there should be only two genders, and the notion that scientific language is neutral.

Fine, Cordelia (2010). *Delusions of Gender: how our minds, society, and neurosexism create difference*. (New York: W.W. Norton.) An accessible critique of research on sex differences in the brain.

Jordan-Young, Rebecca M. (2010). *Brain Storm: the flaws in the science of sex differences*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.) The author presents a sophisticated analysis of the methodological problems with research linking prenatal hormones to sex differences in the brain. She challenges researchers to come up with a new, dynamic model that focuses on the processes of development instead of trying to measure "essential" male–female differences presumed to be the outcome of prenatal hormone differences.

Maccoby, Eleanor E. (1998). *The Two Sexes: growing up apart, coming together*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.)

A well-respected pioneer in the psychology of gender development summarizes research showing how the sex-segregated "two cultures of childhood" merge gradually into a more gender-integrated adult culture—and some of the problems that result.

Roughgarden, Joan (2004). *Evolution's Rainbow: diversity, gender, and sexuality in nature and people*. (Berkeley: University of California Press.) The author, a biologist and transgendered woman, provides a tour of the sexual diversity present in the natural world. She shakes up traditional ideas about evolution and helps the reader question what is "natural" with respect to sex and gender.

POWER, INEQUALITIES, AND PREJUDICE

Beliefs about the differences between women and men have consequences. In a recent demonstration of this principle, two Canadian researchers (Funk and Werhun 2011) brought men into their lab and asked them to squeeze a handgrip as hard as they could. Afterward, some of the men were told they squeezed "like a girl." Would such a judgment make men feel badly? Interfere with later performance? Indeed. On later tests, men who received this feedback showed a threatened sense of masculinity, reduced performance on a cognitive task, and less attentional self-control than men who were not told their grip strength was girl-like. And when given another chance to use the handgrip, these men squeezed more strongly than other men—perhaps trying to prove their masculinity. Believing that they had violated gender-related expectations apparently shook these men's self-confidence, interfered with their ability to think straight, and motivated them to work hard to prove their masculinity.

The finding that gender stereotypes can exert such effects is a clue to how integral they are to societal norms. These stereotypes are such a pervasive part of our social environment that often we don't even see them as stereotypes, but rather as "the way things are."

GENDER STEREOTYPES: INSTRUMENTALITY VS. EXPRESSIVENESS

Decades ago, two sociologists (Parsons and Bales 1955) characterized the main themes in gender stereotypic expectations for femininity and masculinity. Women were viewed as more expressive, with qualities that emphasized an orientation to emotion and relationships; men were viewed as more instrumental, with qualities that focused on action, leadership, and accomplishment. To a large extent, the core aspects of these stereotypes have been found repeatedly by researchers, even across cultures. For example, 75 percent of adults surveyed in 25 countries associated six adjectives (adventurous, dominant, forceful, independent, masculine, strong) with men and three (sentimental, submissive, superstitious) with women (Williams and Best 1990).

Gender stereotypes do change over time, but fairly slowly—and the feminine stereotype seems to have been more fluid in recent decades. For the 20 years between 1973 and 1993, US college women's attribution of masculine-stereotyped qualities to themselves increased significantly, while men's attribution of feminine-stereotyped qualities to themselves did not change (Twenge 1997) and, when asked to project what women and men would be like in the future, respondents predicted women would take on more masculine-stereotyped qualities and roles (Diekman and Eagly 2000).

Changes in gender stereotypes and the related expectations for women and men are probably linked to cultural, political and economic changes. In the United States, women have increasingly moved into the paid workforce and taken on occupational roles previously occupied by men, whereas men's roles have not changed so much. It is not surprising, then, that only women's self-views and the perceptions of women have changed to incorporate more masculine traits and behaviors. In countries such as Chile and Brazil, social change has pushed both men and women into more urban, industrial environments and greater technological competence, leading to an increased emphasis on the masculine-stereotyped qualities of independence and problem-solving skills. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, perceptions

of increases in stereotypically masculine characteristics not only in women, but also in men, were found to increase over time in these countries (Diekman *et al.* 2005).

Descriptions and prescriptions

Gender stereotypes are more than just descriptive—beliefs about what typical men and women are like. Stereotypes of masculinity and femininity certainly contain this descriptive element, which can influence expectations and even what we notice or ignore about individual men and women. However, they also incorporate a very important prescriptive element. Prescriptive stereotypes specify what women and men *should* be like; they are unwritten but powerful rules about what women and men ought to do to conform to society's expectations about femininity and masculinity. The men in the opening example who were told they squeezed "like a girl" were implicitly being told not just that they differed from the typical man, but that they had violated one of the prescriptions for masculinity by being weak. No wonder they had trouble thinking straight!

The prescriptive aspects of gender stereotypes can be broken down into several categories (Prentice and Carranza 2002). First, there are *intensified prescriptions*: positive qualities that are considered especially desirable for either women or men. For example, in North America it is considered very important for women to be warm, kind, and interested in children. Men who have these qualities are also viewed positively, but for women it is more important. Then there are *relaxed prescriptions*: positive qualities that are viewed as desirable for anyone, but for which either women or men are more easily forgiven if they fall short. For example, intelligence is valued in both men and women, but women are judged less harshly than men if they are seen as lacking in this quality, Next, there are *intensified proscriptions*: qualities that are undesirable in general, but viewed as especially undesirable in one gender or the other. For example, promiscuity is viewed as a bad thing—but promiscuous women are the targets of more disapproval than promiscuous men. Finally, there are *relaxed proscriptions*: socially undesirable traits that nonetheless receive more approval when displayed by one gender than the other. For

example, it would be hard to argue that it is a good thing to be shy, but a shy woman is more likely than a shy man to be excused for this quality.

There are important implications of the notion that one gender may be more likely than the other to be stigmatized or punished for displaying a particular undesirable quality. For example, it is considered more important for women than for men to be physically attractive—and one key aspect of attractiveness in Western cultures is thinness. Being overweight is considered undesirable—but more so for women than for men. Employers apparently attribute negative characteristics to heavy women such as laziness, emotional instability, incompetence, lack of self-discipline and low supervisory potential (Puhl and Brownell 2001), and women's (but not men's) body mass is associated with lower wages and lower career success (Glass, Haas and Reither 2010). There is some evidence that the impact of heaviness on women's occupational outcomes begins very early: overweight women are less likely than other women to earn college degrees (Glass, Haas and Reither 2010). For men, on the other hand, weight seems to have no relationship with educational attainment. Why would heavy women be less likely to complete college? Perhaps their high school teachers and peers judge them more harshly and are less likely to provide encouragement. Stereotypes may appear ephemeral and unimportant, but they have very tangible consequences.

The prescriptive masculine stereotype appears more rigid than the feminine one; indeed, some researchers have shown that a significant and very upsetting form of harassment for men is the claim by others that an individual is "not man enough" (Waldo, Berdahl and Fitzgerald 1998). Men and boys react strongly to feedback that they are gender-deviant: in one study, men who were told they scored high on a feminine knowledge test declined to publicize their scores and later expressed stronger masculine interests (Rudman and Fairchild 2004). In another study, men who were told falsely that their personality score was similar to that of a typical woman were more likely than other men to harass a female partner by sending her pornographic material (Maass *et al.* 2003).

Both women and men can be caught in "double binds" in which the prescriptive stereotype for their gender directly

conflicts with the prescriptions for an occupational or social role they are performing. A woman in a leadership position must display decisiveness and toughness that are antithetical to the feminine role. If she appears too tough and decisive, she is likely to be criticized as unfeminine. A man who decides to earn his living as a nurse may find that the compassion and willingness to accept direction necessary for the performance of this role are viewed by others as signs that he is not sufficiently masculine.

"Truth" and stereotypes

It is commonly thought that stereotypes contain a "grain of truth." Such a claim is difficult to evaluate with respect to gender stereotypes, particularly since gender stereotypes are somewhat dynamic. However, some researchers have shown that women's and men's self-descriptions tend to differ less than their estimates of male–female differences in general. So apparently people do not see themselves in ways that match the stereotypes—even if they think those stereotypes are accurate for others. Another researcher (Swim 1994) found that respondents' estimates of gender differences fairly mirrored research findings, but that they underestimated the impact of situations on such differences. Indeed, this is likely to be the main problem with evaluating the accuracy of stereotypes. As noted in the previous chapter, many of the attributes we associate with women and men are not essential, built-in, aspects of personality, but rather responses to social conditions that differ for the two genders. If gender is a social construction, as argued in Chapter 1, then gender stereotypes are social constructions too.

The impact of the media on gender stereotypes

In one episode of the well-known sitcom *Friends*, Ross, a recent father divorced from his wife, spends time caring for his infant son. Dismayed to find the boy clinging to a Barbie doll, Ross tries to get him interested in a GI Joe "action figure" instead. The message that boys aren't supposed to play with dolls (and that, if they do, those dolls are actually not "dolls" but "action figures") comes through loud and clear. Whereas it is meant, in part, to

poke fun at gender stereotypes, the episode reinforces both the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of stereotypes. It reminds viewers that boys don't play with dolls and, perhaps more importantly, it reminds them that the adults in a boy's social environment get very upset if he *does* seem interested in dolls.

The media contribute strongly to the construction of gender stereotypes. The stereotypic instrumental–expressive distinction between women and men is reinforced by a steady stream of media images. Content analyses of prime-time television programming, commercials, and films have shown for years that male characters are portrayed more often in work-related roles, whereas female characters tend to be shown in interpersonal roles in families, friendships, and romance. Both female and male characters are most likely to be portrayed in gender-traditional roles and occupations. The work roles in which female characters are seen usually involve clerical or service occupations and are unlikely to include the exercise of authority and instrumental behavior. These portrayals do affect viewers: a stream of studies in different countries has shown that the more television young viewers watch, the more they accept stereotypical beliefs about gender. It is difficult to see how gender stereotypes can change if media portrayals do not.

WOMEN ARE WONDERFUL—BUT INCOMPETENT? EVALUATING WOMEN AND MEN

A discussion of gender stereotypes may lead us to wonder whether they are really so bad—especially for women. After all, the qualities stereotypically attributed to women tend to be rather desirable. Women are seen as warm and caring, empathic, supportive. By contrast, masculine qualities (assertiveness, dominance, leadership orientation) may not seem quite so likeable. Such reflections are a reminder that stereotypes imply more than beliefs about the qualities associated with particular groups—they also involve feelings about favorability, approval, liking and admiration for those groups. In other words, they are connected with evaluation. As we move from the notion that women and men have certain qualities to the notion that we like, admire, or disdain women or men because of those qualities, we are moving from stereotyping

to prejudice. Evaluative judgments based on individuals' gender represent a type of prejudice labeled *sexism*.

There is plenty of evidence, to be explored throughout this book, that women are frequently the targets of sexist discrimination. Historically, they have often been excluded from roles, places, and behaviors. Currently, they are underrepresented in most powerful positions, underpaid in comparison to men, and, in many parts of the world, have less access than men to education, medical care, and political power. Strangely, all this does not seem to mean that people *like* women less than men. Indeed, researchers have found that both women and men evaluate women as a group more favorably than men—a finding dubbed the "women are wonderful" effect (Eagly, Mladinic and Otto 1991). However, liking does not necessarily translate into respect, and favorable attitudes toward women do not seem to translate into confidence that they will perform well in situations that require competence, decisiveness, or leadership. Similarly, unfavorable stereotypes of men, that they are less empathic and sensitive than women, may support the notion that men are less likable than women —but make better leaders. Masculine qualities such as these may be less "warm and fuzzy," but they are associated with power. One group of researchers argues that a succinct summary of gender stereotypes and prejudice would be "Men are bad, but bold, and women are wonderful but weaker" (Glick *et al*. 2004: 714).

Stereotypes and status

Social psychologists Laurie Rudman and Peter Glick (2008) argue that the strong prescriptive aspect of gender stereotypes is largely rooted in twin factors: a social structure that assigns men more power and status than women, and the intimate interdependence of gender roles. Prescriptive masculine stereotypes help to maintain gender hierarchy by ensuring that boys and men are trained in, and reinforced for, behaviors that keep their status and power high: leadership, decision-making, dominance, achievement-oriented behavior. Prescriptive feminine stereotypes safeguard the hierarchy by keeping pressure on girls and women to assume traditional supportive, nurturing roles. Because these two sets of status-differentiated roles are interdependent, promoting a great deal of

everyday role-guided social contact between women and men (e.g. female secretaries interacting with male executives, female dental assistants interacting with male dentists, female aides interacting with male political leaders), there are plenty of opportunities to reinforce the prescriptive stereotypes.

An example of the impact of associating power and status with masculinity can be seen in the differing reactions to female and male political leaders. Participants in one study reacted negatively to female politicians portrayed as interested in seeking power, but men's power-seeking intentions did not affect participants' reactions to them (Okimoto and Brescoll 2010). Not only did respondents express less desire to vote for a "power-seeking" woman politician than for a woman not perceived as seeking power, but they were also more likely to express feelings of moral outrage toward her: emotions of contempt, anger, and disgust. The researchers concluded that this moral outrage was based on the woman's violation of the prescription that she should be
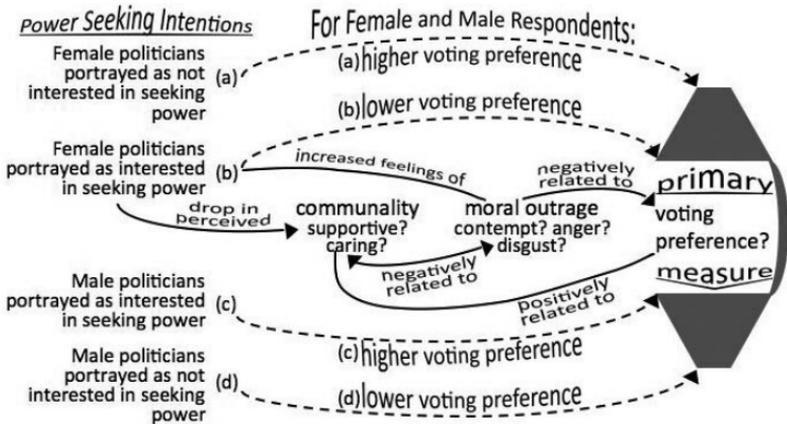
Figure 2.1: Power seeking and the backlash against female politicians. When respondents in this study read a description of a hypothetical female politician, they responded differently, depending on whether or not she appeared interested in seeking power. If she was interested in seeking power, they viewed her as less communal and caring, expressed more reluctance to vote for her, and reacted with more negative emotions than they did if she appeared uninterested in power. Male politicians, on the other hand, were not penalized for being interested in power.

Source: Based on Okimoto and Brescoll (2010), Study 2.

communal in her focus. Such reactions to women perceived as ambitious or power-oriented serve to keep women out of powerful positions and maintain a status difference between women and men.

In support of the idea that prescriptive gender stereotypes serve to maintain status differences between women and men, Rudman and Glick note that the most intensified proscriptions for women, the traits or behaviors that generate the most negative reactions, are those that involve women in claiming or asserting power: rebelliousness, stubbornness, dominance. For men, on the other hand, the most intensified proscriptions involve traits or behaviors that undermine masculine power: emotionality, approval-seeking, readiness to yield to others. These proscriptions are captured in the derogatory labels flung at individuals who fail to conform: women who act "uppity" are characterized as bitches; men who are too easy-going and do not enact masculine prerogatives for power are labeled wimps.

Since men are likely to gain the most from a gender hierarchy that puts them on top, it makes sense that they would hold stronger prescriptive gender stereotypes than women. Research supports this prediction. Men score higher than women on endorsement of traditional gender roles, and react more negatively than women to people who violate gender prescriptions (Glick *et al.* 1997; Glick *et al.* 2004).

An important thing to remember about stereotypes, though, is that they often operate below levels of awareness. We have been discussing the explicit endorsement of gender stereotypes, but researchers have demonstrated that stereotypes can also operate implicitly. Implicit stereotypes guide our reactions and judgments of others even when they are contrary to our explicit beliefs. Thus, for example, women may explicitly reject the idea that women should be subservient, yet be just as likely as men to show automatic negative reactions to women who act authoritative, ambitious, or competitive (Rudman and Glick 1999). Thus, both women and men may, knowingly or unknowingly, enforce gender prescriptions by their negative reactions to individuals who violate them.

SEXISM IS COMPLICATED

Types of prejudice abound. We can think, for example, of racism, ageism, classism: each one an evaluative reaction to individuals based on their group membership. Every type of prejudice is complicated, but sexism is perhaps more complicated than most. This is because, unlike most forms of prejudice in which the prejudiced individual is motivated to, and often can, avoid contact with the target group, people who harbor sexist beliefs are usually in close, even intimate contact with members of the target group. Men and women who hold very sexist attitudes form intimate partnerships with members of the other gender. Women and men work together, parent children together, make decisions together, and often enjoy each other's company a great deal, sometimes while holding firmly to sexist beliefs. Thus theorists and researchers have struggled to analyze sexism and its different manifestations.

Old-fashioned vs. modern sexism

How frequently do we hear openly sexist statements such as "women have no head for politics," or "men are just overgrown babies"? Such overtly derogatory comments reflect the blatant sexism that used to be routinely expressed in many contexts. In recent decades, such comments have become less acceptable, less "politically correct." Does that mean sexism is on the wane? Perhaps, but equally likely is the possibility that it has gone underground. Openly sexist comments that endorse stereotypic judgments about women and men and differential treatment of them would now be characterized as old-fashioned sexism, and are often greeted with disapproval. However, researchers have identified a more subtle form of prejudice, labeled *modern sexism* (Swim *et al.* 1995) or *neosexism* (Tougas *et al.* 1995). Modern sexism entails a lack of support for policies designed to promote equality-oriented changes in gender relations, antagonism toward women's demands for access and inclusion, and denial that gender discrimination still exists. An expression of modern sexism might be, for example, "I'm all for women's rights, but these women complaining about discrimination in employment are going too far: they're too pushy and unreasonable."

Hostile and benevolent sexism

A breakthrough in understanding the maintenance of sexist attitudes even in the context of intimate relationships came when researchers zeroed in on the ambivalence that often characterizes gender-related attitudes. Remember the evidence that people like women more than men, but still don't necessarily respect their abilities or leadership potential? Those mixed feelings are a sign of *ambivalent sexism*: a constellation of attitudes made up of both hostile and benevolent feelings toward the other gender.

Whereas most theories of prejudice have focused only on the hostility directed at the targets, Peter Glick and Susan Fiske (1996) developed an analysis of sexism that explored how individuals maintain the balance between male dominance and intimate interdependence between women and men. Their research identified two intertwined sets of attitudes that support gender ideologies: *hostile sexism* and *benevolent sexism*. Whereas hostile sexism comprises derogatory beliefs about the other gender, benevolent sexism entails warmer but condescending attitudes. Hostile sexism toward women includes attitudes that men should be in charge of, and look after, women, that women are incompetent and untrustworthy, and that heterosexual relationships with women are dangerous and confining for men. Benevolent sexism directed at women includes the attitudes that men should be protective and chivalrous toward women, put women on a pedestal, and that a man needs an intimate relationship with a woman to be complete.

Hostile sexism directed at men includes resentment of their presumed control and dominance, the belief that men are incompetent in certain domains, and the idea that male–female relationships tend to be adversarial. Benevolent sexism toward men includes the attitude that men need to be taken care of, the belief that men are naturally better at some things (especially dangerous or difficult things), and the notion that women need romantic partnerships with men in order to feel fulfilled.

Why would hostile and benevolent attitudes co-exist? Perhaps because, despite the resentments that can accompany the hierarchical relationship between men and women, each gender gets something out of that relationship and so has some stake in

maintaining it and feeling good about it (Rudman and Glick 2008). The traditional masculine and feminine gender roles are interdependent: despite resenting men for their dominating behavior, women may depend on men and feel grateful to them for protection; despite viewing women as incompetent and so feeling contemptuous of them, men may depend on, and feel grateful for, women's warmth, care and nurturing.

Women are consistently less likely than men to endorse hostile sexist attitudes toward women. However, women do not always see benevolent sexist attitudes as a problem, often endorsing these attitudes as strongly, or even more strongly, than men do. It is tempting to think that benevolent sexism cannot be so bad if it entails positive feelings toward the target. However, as Rudman and Glick (2008) argue, benevolent sexism produces patronizing, even if affectionate, behavior such as "treating her like a pet or mascot, just as one might love a particularly clumsy and not-too-bright pet dog or cat whose incompetence is endearing." Patronizing behavior undermines the target's self-confidence and promotes an image of strength and superiority for the patronizer and weakness for the target—effectively reinforcing the dominance of one over the other. The benevolent attitudes also tend to be directed mainly toward women who conform to traditional femininity; women who "break the rules" are not necessarily viewed as meriting chivalry or protection. Furthermore, benevolent sexism, by seeming positive and "nice," can undermine women's resistance to gender inequality.

What about hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes toward men? These too tend to support traditional male dominance. High hostility toward men is associated with the idea that male dominance is inevitable, even if unpleasant—a necessary evil that women have to cope with. Interestingly, the women who score highest on hostility to men tend to be, not feminists, but rather those with the most traditional gender-role attitudes and the lowest support for feminism. For women, an adversarial view of men may imply a manipulative approach to heterosexual relationships, such as the idea that men have to be "tricked" into marriage. Such an approach is congruent with benevolent sexism toward men, which implies that a woman needs a man to provide for her and protect her—even though she has to take care of him.

Hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes toward both women and men are found to be strongest in societies where gender equality is lowest (Glick *et al.* 2004). In such cultures, women are encouraged to accept male dominance in return for male protection; men are encouraged to provide materially for women in exchange for emotional support, nurture, and submissiveness.

Sexism in the evaluation of work

What kind of person comes to mind when we think of a nurse? An airline pilot? The CEO of a multinational corporation? Most people automatically generate images that conform to gender expectations: a female nurse, a male pilot, a male corporate leader. This tendency would not be so problematic if it did not also entail a tendency to be a little suspicious of gender-nontraditional occupants of such roles and expect them to perform more poorly. It turns out, though, that people's judgments about work performance are often affected by the gender of the person doing the work and the perceived fit between gender roles and certain kinds of work.

If gender stereotypes say generally that men are more competent than women, we might expect men's work to be evaluated more positively than women's. Just such a pattern was shown clearly in an early study by Philip Goldberg (1968), who asked female respondents to judge the quality of a written article that was attributed to either a female or male author. The same article was judged better on several dimensions when it was thought to be written by a man than when the author was listed as a woman. These results were all the more unsettling because the people making these biased judgments were women. Many years later, Goldberg's study was extended to include both male and female respondents and articles designed to reflect a traditionally masculine (politics), traditionally feminine (psychology of women), or neutral (education) area of expertise (Paludi and Strayer 1985). In that study, both women and men evaluated the articles—even those in the feminine and gender-neutral fields— more favorably when they were attributed to male authors. Researchers have since demonstrated that such a pro-male bias is not always found (Top 1991), but that it is most likely to occur in

certain kinds of situations: when the domain in question is stereotypically masculine, when raters do not have much specific information about the expertise of the person whose work is being judged, and when people are evaluating a résumé rather than other kinds of written work (Swim *et al.* 1989).

Many of us would protest that we do not allow gender stereotypes to bias our judgments of others' work, competence, or potential. Yet, as noted earlier in this chapter, stereotypic judgments need not necessarily be explicit; they can and do occur without our awareness. Researchers uncover such implicit gender stereotypes through a method that presents respondents with a series of traits adjectives and asks them to pair those traits with either women or men as quickly as possible. The speed with which someone responds is taken as a measure of how easily the association fits into her/his network or associations for that gender. Thus respondents with strong implicit gender stereotypes might, for example, respond more quickly to the pairing of *kind—woman* than to the pairing of *kind—man*. Using this approach, researchers have found, for example, that respondents associate women more readily with egalitarian words and men with hierarchical words (Schmid Mast 2004) and that they associate women with subordinate roles and men with authority roles (Rudman and Kilianski 2000).

Implicit gender stereotypes affect perceptions of workers and work. For example, researchers have found that people implicitly associate women with traits considered characteristic of elementary school teachers and men with traits stereotypic of accountants and engineers (White and White 2006). An interesting example of the operation of such implicit stereotyping in the realm of work is seen in a study of attitudes toward female and male managers (Latu *et al.* 2011). The researchers asked college students to respond to questionnaires measuring hostile and benevolent sexism and also to a questionnaire measuring how motivated they were to respond without sexism. Additionally, they measured the implicit associations students held with respect to gender and traits of successful or unsuccessful managers. All participants showed explicitly positive views of women in the workplace, and those who had the strongest internal motivation to avoid responding in a sexist way did not show implicit prejudice against women as

managers. However, on the implicit measure, the men associated men with the traits of successful managers and women with traits of unsuccessful managers. Female respondents showed stronger associations of women than men with successful manager traits. These researchers also showed that implicit stereotypes might have some very practical consequences: the more participants implicitly associated men with the traits of successful managers, the higher was their recommended salary for a male employee.

There is also clear evidence that, outside the laboratory, individuals apply prejudiced evaluations without realizing they are doing so. In one recent study, faculty members at large, research-intensive universities in the United States were asked to evaluate an application from a graduate student for a lab manager position (Moss-Racusin *et al.* 2012). Some faculty members received an application ostensibly from a woman; others received the identical application, ostensibly from a man. The gender of the applicant made a significant difference: respondents rated the applicant as more competent and worthy of being hired, proposed
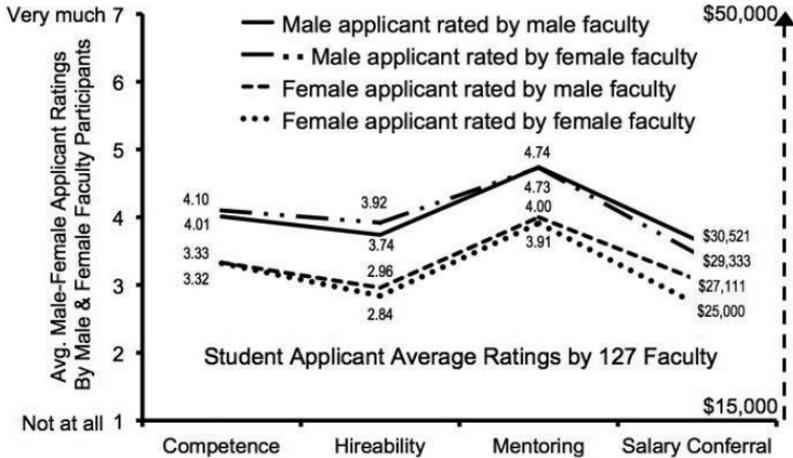

Figure 2.2: Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. When faculty members in science departments of research-intensive universities in the United States evaluated identical male and female applicants for a lab manager position, male applicants received higher ratings and were offered higher salaries.

Source: Based on data from Moss-Racusin *et al.* (2012).

to provide more mentoring, and suggested a higher salary when the name on the application was male than when it was female. In a context of high national concern about attracting more women into science fields, these faculty members had no doubt been encouraged to support and foster female graduate students, yet male applicants were favored.

SEXISM AND THE MEDIA

We have seen that the media reinforce and strengthen gender stereotypes—a process that can, of course, lead indirectly to sexism. However, there is ample evidence that the media promote sexism directly too. Blatant misogyny—hatred of or disdain for women—is all too common in the words of performers and media commentators and in the depictions of women in television, film, music and video games. Rap music, for example, frequently includes derogatory and hostile statements about women, lyrics approving rape and physical violence against women, claims that women are "beneath" men, and references to women as objects to be used and discarded (Adams and Fuller 2006). Rap or hip hop music often fairly drips with hostile sexism and is more likely than other genre to use words such as "bitch" and "hoe" to define women (Frisby 2010). However, themes of benevolent sexism are rampant in pop music, where the lyrics often emphasize that women are valued and appreciated mainly for their bodies and appearance or their "sweetness." Female characters are underrepresented and sexualized in video games (Dill and Thill 2007), and some games glorify the rape or other abuse of women.

Even in the more staid world of media political punditry, prejudice against women is often evident. For example, in one documentary examining the media portrayal of gender, a collection of nasty remarks by radio or television commentators about female political leaders includes reference to "that ugly hag, Madeleine Albright," and a description of US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor as having "not the sort of face you'd like to see on a five-dollar bill" (*All Things Considered* 2011). Research is clear that negative portrayals of female political leaders impact people's perceptions—particularly among men who already hold sexist attitudes (Schlehofer *et al.* 2011). When media portrayals are

positive, female politicians may be viewed by both women and men as both competent and warm, but men high in hostile sexism exposed to negative media portrayals of women politicians are likely to see those women as both incompetent and cold.

IMPACT OF SEXISM ON ITS TARGETS

Being a target of sexism has consequences: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. We saw in this chapter's opening example that men told they "squeezed like a girl" had trouble thinking well afterwards. Other studies have shown that men in traditionally feminine occupations may be at special risk of bullying or being "hassled," and have higher rates of absences and turnover in their jobs (Evans and Steptoe 2002).

It is not just being in an occupation that is at odds with gender norms that causes such problems, but the attitudes of an individual's co-workers. One study of German men in non-traditional occupations (e.g. nursing, elder care, elementary school teaching, hairdressing) found that the attitudes of their female colleagues were directly related to the men's depressive moods and job dissatisfaction (Sobiraj *et al.* 2011). Men whose female colleagues endorsed statements such as, "It bothers me when a man does something I consider 'feminine,'" were significantly more depressed than their counterparts whose female colleagues did not endorse such attitudes.

Stereotype threat

It can be an uncomfortable feeling to be in a situation where others are skeptical of our qualifications or expect us to perform poorly. That feeling, that uneasy awareness of being judged according to negative stereotypes about our group, has been dubbed *stereotype threat* (Steele 1997). Researchers have found that the awareness that others are applying negative stereotypes to us in our current activities often translates into poor performance. For example, women high in mathematical ability perform more poorly than their male counterparts when told they are taking a math test on which men generally score higher—but not when given the same test with the message that women and men

generally have similar scores (Spencer, Steele and Quinn 1999). Researchers theorize that victims of stereotype threat may lose confidence and tend to disengage from tasks associated with the threatened ability, perhaps investing less effort. In the current example, reminding these high-ability women of the stereotype that women are "not good at math" may have made them withdraw effort from the task, resulting in poorer performance.

Another way in which stereotype threat may harm performance is through the necessity to use cognitive energy to counter the stereotype. Researchers have found that when women given math problems to solve are exposed to negative stereotypes about their math performance, they apparently use some of their working memory to counter the stereotype, instead of having all that memory available to solve the problems. When women are "retrained" to associate being female with being *good* at math, they show increased working memory capacity and their math performance improves (Forbes and Schmader 2010). Indeed, some researchers have suggested that stereotype threat is partially responsible for women's historically lower performance in mathematics and the physical sciences (e.g. Good, Aronson and Harder 2008).

One impact of stereotype threat may be a shift in behavior in an attempt to avoid conforming to the stereotype. In a series of studies, researchers exposed women to the stereotype that effective leadership is associated with masculine rather than feminine characteristics. The women were then given the opportunity to respond to hypothetical situations requiring assertive leadership (von Hippel *et al.* 2011). Women exposed to the stereotype tended to alter their communication style in a traditionally masculine direction by speaking more directly, using fewer hedges, hesitations and tag questions. Ironically, these very changes caused a negative reaction. Evaluators rated women who used a more masculine communication style as less warm and likeable and, most importantly, they indicated less willingness to comply with these women's requests. Thus in trying to disconfirm the stereotype that "women can't lead effectively," the women may have undermined their own leadership effectiveness. These women faced a stark example of the double bind produced by prescriptive gender stereotypes: no matter what they did they were violating a norm.

The impact of stereotype threat extends far beyond the social psychology laboratory and beyond simple decrements in performance. Whereas, in life outside the laboratory, individuals are less likely than in previous decades to encounter bald stereotypic statements such as "men do better than women at math" or "women make poor leaders," these and other stereotypes can be communicated and absorbed in many subtle ways. One series of studies of women in various work settings showed that the mere process of comparing themselves with male colleagues seemed to trigger stereotype threat in women (von Hippel *et al.* 2011). Why would this happen? Probably because, in many workplaces, men are paid more, advance more quickly, and are assigned more "important" work than women. A woman in such a workplace, comparing her career progress and success with that of male colleagues, might well begin to wonder if she were being evaluated on the basis of her gender. These researchers showed that women who compared themselves with male colleagues were more likely than other women to experience stereotype threat. Further, that stereotype threat contributed to a set of problematic work-related attitudes. In the first place, stereotype threat was related to identity separation: women's differentiation of their identity into a "work self" (perhaps persuasive, analytical, ambitious) and a "female self" (perhaps warm, sensitive, accommodating). Such identity separation signals a sense of "not belonging" and may have mental health consequences for women who feel they must not express their "female self" when at work. In the second place, the threat was associated with women's belief that their career prospects were limited, a lack of confidence that they would achieve their career goals. Finally, both directly and through these two attitudes, stereotype threat led to lowered job satisfaction and increased intention to quit their jobs. It appears that stereotype threat has the potential to affect individuals' workplace experiences in a variety of complex ways, particularly in work settings where there is an imbalance between women and men and/or where roles have been stereotypically gendered, workers' natural and often irresistible tendency to make cross-gender comparisons may trigger the problems associated with stereotype threat. The only way out of this kind of situation is

for workplaces to become more gender-balanced and for occupational roles to be more evenly distributed by gender.

Responding to expressions of sexism

Being the target of sexist comments or actions can be upsetting and stressful: the experience of gender prejudice has been linked to depression, anxiety, lowered self-esteem and anger. Women are far from complacent about such incidents. In one study, women who were targets of scripted sexist remarks by male confederates almost always found the remarks objectionable, viewed the speaker as prejudiced, and felt angry (Swim and Hyers 1999). Yet these women were restrained and cautious when it came to responding publicly to the remarks. Whereas 81 percent of the women in a simulated version of this study predicted they would confront the person making a sexist comment, only 45 percent of the women in the actual study did this.

In a more recent study, participants kept daily diaries for two weeks about their experiences of gender prejudice (Brinkman, Garcia and Rickard 2011). In about a third of the reported instances of gender prejudice, the women said that they had not actually responded in the way they would have preferred. Usually, this discrepancy between desired and actual responses took the form of wanting to confront the perpetrator, but not doing so. The women attributed their reluctance to confront to a variety of reasons, such as not being cost effective (e.g. "it would have escalated the situation"), concern about social norms (e.g. "it would have made someone feel worse"), and being constrained by the situation (e.g. "class was starting"). The most frequent inhibitor of confrontation was concern about social norms—a finding that underlines the power of prescriptive gender stereotypes. Apparently these women were well aware that, if they confronted the perpetrator, they would be negatively evaluated as prickly, oversensitive, and complaining, and that, as women, they were expected to smooth over the situation rather than make it worse. Thus, even though they were the targets of boorish behavior, these women often felt constrained to avoid rocking the boat and violating the expectation that they would be sociable, agreeable, and "nice." Clearly, the social pressure exerted by social

norms makes it very difficult for individual women to push back against sexism, even when they feel justified in doing so.

FEMINISM AS A COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO SEXISM

Outside a New York city rock radio station one day in 2002, a group of angry young women, organized by Riot Grrrl NYC, gathered to protest "cock rock," and the station's male-dominated playlist. Carrying signs such as "Do women have to be naked to get on the radio?" and "We love girl music," and chanting slogans such as "You're teaching girls that women suck … we won't give in and we won't give up," these women scoffed at the notion that they should be "reasonable" or that the station was blameless and merely responding to audience demand. As one participant later wrote, she was not interested in "a bigger slice of male-dominated pie—I want a different pie, I want a bigger piece of it, and I don't want to cook it" (Ragonese 2002: 27).

In New Delhi, on July 31, 2011, hundreds of women marched in India's first "SlutWalk' to protest the growing sexual violence against women. The title of the march is meant to underline the idea that women should not have to fear sexual assault, no matter what they wear (RFI 2011). The event, one of many similar ones around the world, was designed to challenge the idea that sexual assault is the fault of the victim, caused by her choice of clothing or behavior. The women felt compelled to march because the problem is so pervasive: a recent survey showed that 85 percent of New Delhi's women fear sexual harassment when they leave home.

These protest actions represent collective responses to sexism—something that may be far easier and more effective than the individual responses discussed in the previous section. Research has clearly demonstrated that it is harder to challenge social norms as an individual than with others (Cialdini and Griskevicius 2010), and the history of social movements indicates that such movements can succeed over time in changing rules and expectations. With respect to challenging traditional inequities between women and men, the driving ideologies behind such movements have been various versions of *feminism*. The many shades of feminism have in common a desire to challenge gender inequalities and a belief

that women's lives and experiences are important and should be taken seriously. Yet despite the apparent reasonableness of such ideals, the term "feminist" has acquired a dubious reputation in some circles, and some young women reject the label even while endorsing the goal of gender equality.

Feminist movements around the world have, over time, had life-changing impacts: from the early suffrage movements that won women the right to vote, to reproductive rights movements that have strengthened women's right to make decisions about childbearing, to anti-violence movements that have agitated for protection against sexual assault and domestic violence, to a variety of organizations that have pushed for an end to workplace discrimination. Such organizations are driven by the energy and convictions of individual participants—but how and why does an individual identify with, align and coalesce with a feminist movement?

Psychologists have long favored theories of identity development that involve progression through various stages of understanding and commitment. Following in this tradition, Downing and Roush (1985) postulated a model of feminist identity development in which women were said to progress through five sequential stages: passive acceptance (the woman is unaware of discrimination against her based on her sex); revelation (with the realization that discrimination exists, the woman becomes angry and hostile toward men); embeddedness-emanation (she attempts to withdraw from patriarchal culture into a women-only culture); synthesis (she begins to reintegrate with the dominant culture, make more independent decisions, and relate to men as individuals rather than as members of a category of oppressors); and active commitment (she espouses a commitment to social change through feminist collective action). In this model, the development of feminist identity is said to be initially triggered by an experience of discrimination, which jolts the woman out of the initial passive acceptance stage.

This model of feminist identity development has been very popular, but researchers now feel that it may not provide an adequate or accurate description of the experience of today's young women. There is little evidence that women move linearly through the five stages. Furthermore, whereas this

model may have captured the experiences of women arriving at a feminist identity in the 1980s, women growing up in the 1990s and later may have a very different "take" on discrimination, gender equality, and feminism. One study found that, in contrast with a model that predicted they would start with "passive acceptance," women developing a feminist identity in the 1990s said there was never a time when they had accepted male superiority and traditional gender expectations; rather, they had always assumed they would be able to "have it all," and only later realized that they were still saddled with traditional expectations associated with marriage and motherhood (Horne, Matthews and Detrie 2001). A study comparing older and younger self-identified feminists and non-feminists found suggestive evidence that as women age they progress from experiencing anger to activism, as the model predicts. However, the study also revealed differences between the experiences of older and younger women (Erchull *et al*. 2009). For the younger women, the starting point seemed more likely to be synthesis—and they moved toward stronger feminist identification and activism as they became aware of subtle discrimination. Erchull and her colleagues suggest the necessity for a new model of feminist identity development:

> Such a model would acknowledge that many young women feel empowered and able to accomplish anything but may not understand the complexities of gender discrimination given that they live in a world where sexism is more subtle than it was in the past.

Regardless of the sequence of stages through which individuals travel to reach an identity as feminists and a commitment to social change, the collective response to sexism that such an identity supports has proven an effective way to challenge gender inequalities and stereotypes that link power and achievement more strongly to men and warmth and relationship concerns more strongly with women. As we will see in the next chapter, both the stereotypes and the challenges to those stereotypes have important implications for relationships between men and women.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Basu, Amrita (ed.) (2010). *Women's Movements in the Global Era*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press.) This reader contains a collection of articles on the origins, development and challenges confronted by women's movements around the world, including South Africa, Pakistan, China, Russia, Poland, and Latin American countries. The international focus makes it a good place to start to understand the impact of feminist collective responses to sexism.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. (2011). *Framed by Gender: how gender inequality persists in the modern world*. (New York: Oxford University Press.) A sociologist describes how we tend to use our traditional beliefs about gender as a framework for organizing new information and dealing with uncertainty—thus unintentionally reproducing old gender stereotypes in new situations.

Rudman, Laurie A. and Glick, Peter (2008). *The Social Psychology of Gender. How Power and Intimacy Shape Gender Relations*. (New York: Guilford Press.) Two social psychologists examine the complex ways in which male dominance co-exists with intimate interdependence to produce our current gender stereotypes and roles.

Implicit Association Test Exercise (2011). http://www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/ This site allows the user to try out a measure of implicit stereotyping: the Implicit Association Test. Versions of the test for both gender and race are available. Trying the test is a good way to get an understanding of what researchers are measuring when they try to assess implicit stereotypes.