

GENDER  
BLENDING

Confronting the Limits  
of Duality

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Indiana University Press

*Bloomington and Indianapolis*

## THREE

# Becoming Members of Society

## *Learning the Social Meanings of Gender*

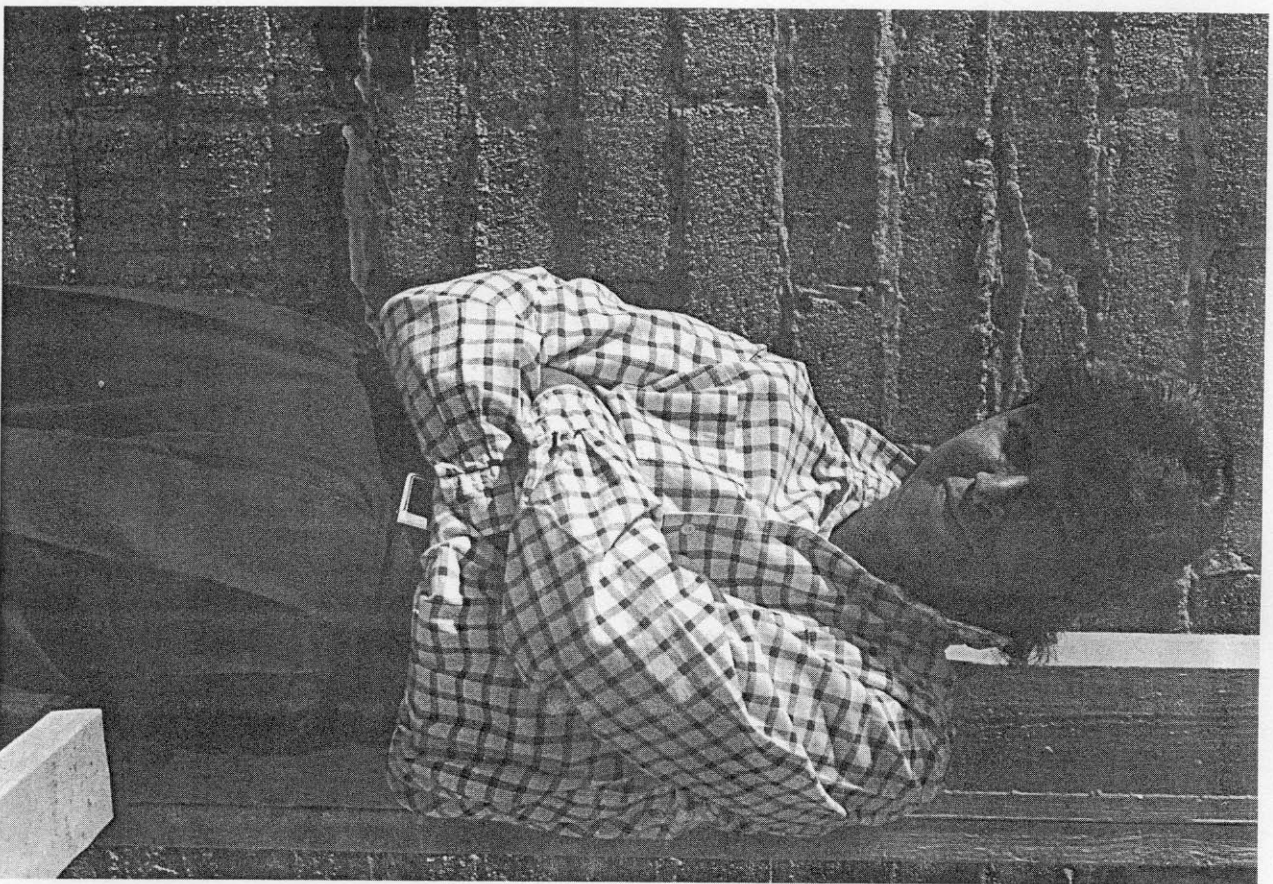
### The Gendered Self

The task of learning to be properly gendered members of society only begins with the establishment of gender identity. Gender identities act as cognitive filtering devices guiding people to attend to and learn gender role behaviors appropriate to their statuses. Learning to behave in accordance with one's gender identity is a lifelong process. As we move through our lives, society demands different gender performances from us and rewards, tolerates, or punishes us differently for conformity to, or digression from, social norms. As children, and later adults, learn the rules of membership in society, they come to see themselves in terms they have learned from the people around them.

Children begin to settle into a gender identity between the age of eighteen months and two years.<sup>1</sup> By the age of two, children usually understand that they are members of a gender grouping and can correctly identify other members of their gender.<sup>2</sup> By age three they have a fairly firm and consistent concept of gender. Generally, it is not until children are five to seven years old that they become convinced that they are permanent members of their gender grouping.<sup>3</sup>

Researchers test the establishment, depth, and tenacity of gender identity through the use of language and the concepts mediated by language. The language systems used in populations studied by most researchers in this field conceptualize gender as binary and permanent. All persons are either male or female. All males are first boys and then men; all females are first girls and then women. People are believed to be unable to change genders without sex change surgery, and those who do change sex are considered to be both disturbed and exceedingly rare.

This is by no means the only way that gender is conceived in all cultures. Many aboriginal cultures have more than two gender categories and accept the idea that, under certain circumstances, gender may be changed without changes being made to biological sex characteristics. Many North and South American native peoples had a legitimate social category for persons who wished to live according to the gender role of another sex. Such people were sometimes revered, sometimes ignored, and occasionally scorned. Each culture had its own word to describe such persons, most commonly translated into



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English as "berdache." Similar institutions and linguistic concepts have also been recorded in early Siberian, Madagascan, and Polynesian societies, as well as in medieval Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Very young children learn their culture's social definitions of gender and gender identity at the same time that they learn what gender behaviors are appropriate for them. But they only gradually come to understand the meaning of gender in the same way as the adults of their society do. Very young children may learn the words which describe their gender and be able to apply them to themselves appropriately, but their comprehension of their meaning is often different from that used by adults. Five year olds, for example, may be able to accurately recognize their own gender and the genders of the people around them, but they will often make such ascriptions on the basis of role information, such as hair style, rather than physical attributes, such as genitals, even when physical cues are clearly known to them. One result of this level of understanding of gender is that children in this age group often believe that people may change their gender with a change in clothing, hair style, or activity.<sup>5</sup>

The characteristics most salient to young minds are the more culturally specific qualities which grow out of gender role prescriptions. In one study, young school age children, who were given dolls and asked to identify their gender, overwhelmingly identified the gender of the dolls on the basis of attributes such as hair length or clothing style, in spite of the fact that the dolls were anatomically correct. Only 17 percent of the children identified the dolls on the basis of their primary or secondary sex characteristics.<sup>6</sup> Children, five to seven years old, understand gender as a function of role rather than as a function of anatomy. Their understanding is that gender (role) is supposed to be stable but that it is possible to alter it at will. This demonstrates that although the standard social definition of gender is based on genitalia, this is not the way that young children first learn to distinguish gender. The process of learning to think about gender in an adult fashion is one prerequisite to becoming a full member of society. Thus, as children grow older, they learn to think of themselves and others in terms more like those used by adults.

Children's developing concepts of themselves as individuals are necessarily bound up in their need to understand the expectations of the society of which they are a part. As they develop concepts of themselves as individuals, they do so while observing themselves as reflected in the eyes of others. Children start to understand themselves as individuals separate from others during the years that they first acquire gender identities and gender roles. As they do so, they begin to understand that others see them and respond to them as particular people. In this way they develop concepts of themselves as individuals, as an "I" (a proactive subject) simultaneously with self-images of themselves as individuals, as a "me" (a member of society, a subjective object). Children learn that they are both as they see themselves and as others see them.<sup>7</sup>

To some extent, children initially acquire the values of the society around them almost indiscriminately. To the degree that children absorb the general-

ized standards of society into their personal concept of what is correct behavior, they can be said to hold within themselves the attitude of the "generalized other."<sup>8</sup> This "generalized other" functions as a sort of monitoring or measuring device with which individuals may judge their own actions against those of their generalized conceptions of how members of society are expected to act. In this way members of society have available to them a guide, or an internalized observer, to turn the more private "I" into the object of public scrutiny, the "me." In this way, people can monitor their own behavioral impulses and censor actions which might earn them social disapproval or scorn. The tension created by the constant interplay of the personal "I" and the social "me" is the creature known as the "self."

But not all others are of equal significance in our lives, and therefore not all others are of equal impact on the development of the self. Any person is available to become part of one's "generalized other," but certain individuals, by virtue of the sheer volume of time spent in interaction with someone, or by virtue of the nature of particular interactions, become more significant in the shaping of people's values. These "significant others" become prominent in the formation of one's self-image and one's ideals and goals. As such they carry disproportionate weight in one's personal "generalized other."<sup>9</sup> Thus, children's individualistic impulses are shaped into a socially acceptable form both by particular individuals and by a more generalized pressure to conformity exerted by innumerable faceless members of society. Gender identity is one of the most central portions of that developing sense of self.

### Gender as a Cognitive Schema

The first important molders of children's concepts of social standards reside within the immediate family group, but very early in life children become exposed to the standards of others in a larger social context. Often the various people in children's lives give them conflicting or confusing messages as to the nature of social standards. Children are only able to make sense of such variety according to their cognitive abilities and within the context of the experiences they have already had and the lessons they have already learned.

Certain ways of understanding social exchanges become more firmly established through repeated experience with them. These cognitive frameworks become more useful to children as they learn that they are the ways that many other people around them share. Different societies, or social groupings within societies, teach children and adults their own ways of recognizing and organizing knowledge. When members of societies share common ways of understanding the people, objects, and events of their lives, they use similar conceptual structures to organize their experience into cognitive bits which make sense to them, and which may be effectively communicated to others. Any conceptual structure that organizes social experience so that this sort of understanding and shared meaning can exist is called a cognitive schema.

Cognitive schemata are therefore basic to social organization and com-

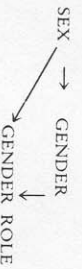
munication. They make it possible for persons to come to common understandings of shared experiences. Without socially accepted cognitive schemata, individuals who experienced the same events could place such diverse interpretations on their simultaneous experiences that it would be difficult to believe that they had all been at the same place at the same time.<sup>10</sup>

Most societies use sex and gender as a major cognitive schema for understanding the world around them.<sup>11</sup> People, objects, and abstract ideas are commonly classified as inherently female or male. The attributes, qualities, or objects actually associated with each class vary widely from society to society, but most do use gender as a most basic groundwork. Gender, then, becomes a nearly universally accepted early cognitive tool used by most children to help them understand the world. This means that children learn that gender is a legitimate way to classify the contents of the world and that others will readily understand them if they communicate through such a framework. Children also learn from those around them what to allocate to the categories of male and female, what elements of all things are considered to fall under the influence of the feminine principle, and which are classified as within the masculine sphere.

In North American society, the gender schema most widely in use is biologically deterministic. While there is some widespread belief and understanding that social factors have an influence on questions of gender, the dominant view remains that biological demands set the limits on the possible effects of social factors. In the script of the dominant gender schema, and in the parlance of the everyday world, the relationship between the main concepts is roughly as follows:<sup>12</sup> It is presumed that there are normally two, and only two, sexes, that all persons are either one sex or the other, and that no person may change sexes without extensive surgical intervention. Sex is believed to so strongly determine gender that these two classifications are commonly conflated to the extent that the terms are used interchangeably, and many people fail to see any conceptual difference between the two. Thus it is also believed that there are two, and only two, genders, and that individuals can effectively change genders only by also changing their sex. Gender roles are that part of the sex/gender bundle that may culturally vary within the constraints of biological imperatives. Gender roles, usually seen to be somewhat determined by social factors, are therefore thought to be less precisely tied to sex and gender than sex and gender are to each other.

Thus, sex is seen as wholly determining gender and largely determining gender role. The practices of gender roles are thought to be biologically constrained by the demands of one's biological sex/gender and socially defined by one's particular rearing within their gender (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. DOMINANT GENDER SCHEMA



The specifics of the definitions of appropriate gender roles for members of each sex/gender class in North American societies vary mainly by age, race, regionality, socio-economic class, ethnicity, and by membership in sexually defined minority groups. Nonetheless, each sub-group generally subscribes to the main premises of the dominant gender schema and forms its particular definitions of appropriate gender roles from within those limitations.

In strongly sex-typed societies, or individuals, a gender schema tends to be a predominant mode of thought. In any given situation, there are always a number of cognitive frameworks one might use to understand the dynamics of that situation. Other major frameworks which might be used to understand situations involving human beings might revolve around race, social class, age, or physical size, but sex-typed individuals, and societies, tend to regard gender as one of the most significant factors in understanding themselves and the situations they find themselves in.

During the period in children's lives when they are first learning their gender identity and gender role, they also learn the definitions and usages of a gender schema. Children learn that they are girls or boys and that everyone else is either a girl or a boy. They learn that girls and boys are different by virtue of the different ways that they act and look, and that certain objects and ideas are associated with maleness and femaleness. As children assimilate the concepts and classifications of the gender schema of their social group, they learn to define themselves and those around them by its terms of reference. A process begins in young minds whereby it becomes not only legitimate but also expedient to sift all experience through the mesh of a gender schema.<sup>13</sup>

Children who are raised within a society which revolves around a gender schema learn to embrace those aspects of the schema which apply to the gender group that they have been assigned to. Because an element of our gender schema is that there are two distinct, non-overlapping gender groups, children also learn to reject those elements of their schema which do not apply to themselves. But it is important that members of society do not so thoroughly reject the gender lessons of the other gender that they become unable to recognize its members and respond appropriately to their cues. As gender schemata are highly complex and can be used to understand almost any experience, children are engaged in this process with increasing sophistication as their cognitive abilities improve with age.

### The Male Standard

In North America, the dominant gender schema is patriarchal, and its assumptions underlie psychological, social, economic, and political definitions of gender. Psychological examinations of personality, for instance, routinely start by dividing subjects into classifications of male and female. The results obtained from such research thus have built into them the parameters of gender. In ways such as this, the division of persons by gender is both legitimized and reinforced. The same kind of emphasis carries through into

social, political, and economic research as well as into research involving animals. Gender is thus forced to become a relevant variable in almost every situation studied.

Research has been undertaken to investigate what people do when they are denied information which readily allows them to use their gender schema as an organizer of information. In one study, adults were exposed to infants whose sex was not disclosed to them. It was found that when adults assumed a sex for a child in the study they most often assumed the child to be male.<sup>14</sup> The attribution of a gender, and the more frequent assumption of maleness, suggest schematic information processing according to a patriarchal gender schema which claims that (1) all persons must be either male or female, and that (2) maleness is primary and generally inclusive of lesser categories.

Adults themselves are so thoroughly imbued with the dominant gender schema that it is virtually impossible to gather any group of them who would be so totally devoid of gender cues as to make suitable confederates for similar studies. Kessler and McKenna, in the mid 1970s, however, did devise a study using line drawings of adults exhibiting mixtures of common gender cues in order to examine how adults recognize and ascribe gender in other adults. By combining nine sex or gender cues (long hair, short hair, wide hips, narrow hips, breasts, flat chest, body hair, penis, and vulva) with two non-gender cues ("unisex" pants and shirt), they were able to produce ninety-six different combinations of characteristics which they overlaid on simple drawings having the same arms, hands, legs, feet, shoulders, waistlines, and faces. The ninety-six different drawings were each shown to equal numbers of male and female adults who were asked to identify the figure they were shown as male or female, to rate the confidence that they had in their appraisal, and to suggest how the figure might be changed to render it a member of the other sex or gender. The results of this study strongly suggested that people see maleness almost whenever there is *any* indication of it. A single strong visual indicator of maleness tended to take precedence in the attribution process over almost any number of indications of femaleness.<sup>15</sup>

Common wisdom and, to a large degree, medical opinion tell us that gender is determined on the basis of genitalia. Thirty-two of the figures used in the Kessler and McKenna study had their genitalia covered by a non-gender specific pair of pants while displaying various combinations of the other possible characteristics. Male and female cues were evenly distributed among the thirty-two drawings of figures wearing pants, but more than two-thirds (69 percent) of the 320 people who viewed these figures saw them as male. Surprisingly, a majority of the figures (57 percent) wearing pants and showing bare breasts were among those seen as male.<sup>16</sup> Thus, more than half of the people who viewed the figures displaying bare breasts were able to ignore, or rationalize away, a major female secondary sex characteristic and somehow still label the figure in the drawing as male.

The tendency to see maleness was even more pronounced among the remaining 640 persons who viewed drawings of figures with exposed genitals.

Kessler and McKenna found that although in theory genitalia determine the sex of an individual, in fact, only male genitals serve this function. In this study, it was overwhelmingly the presence or absence of the male genital cue which determined the sex attributed to the drawings. (No figure had both male and female genitals portrayed.) The drawings which exhibited a penis were almost unanimously (96 percent) identified as male regardless of the presence of any number of female cues such as breast or wide hips.<sup>17</sup> The female genital cue did not have this same power.

The presence of a vulva in a drawing was, by contrast, sufficient to elicit a female identification in only a little less than two-thirds (64 percent) of the representations. In the remaining more than one-third (36 percent) of the drawings where a vulva was in evidence, the people who viewed the drawings were able to disregard that information in favor of male cues which were also present. There were only two combinations of cues that produced a rate of female identification equal to the rate of male identification achieved with the presence of the penis in combination with *any* other cues (male or female). These were the drawings which showed a figure with vulva and wide hips, wearing a "unisex" shirt and long hair; or a figure with vulva, no body hair, breasts, and long hair. In other words, for a figure to be seen virtually every single time as male required only the presence of a penis; for a figure to be identified as female equally as often required the presence of a vulva *plus* one of two specific combinations of three additional cues.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the power of the presence of a penis to elicit a male identification was a full 50 percent stronger than the ability of the presence of a vulva to cue a female identification.

This study demonstrates that even in situations of conflicting, confusing, or absent gender cues, people were willing, able, and likely to attribute gender. It also shows that when there is a doubt as to the gender of an individual, people have a pronounced tendency to see maleness. This study also suggests that maleness is readily seen whenever there are indicators of it, whereas femaleness is seen only when there are compelling female cues and an absence of male cues. This way of seeing corresponds closely to patriarchal gender schema notions of maleness as a positive force and femaleness as a negative force; of maleness as a presence and femaleness as an absence; of maleness as primary and femaleness as derivative. Thus, in North American society, the dominant gender schema rests on and supports patriarchy. It assumes that maleness and its attributes are the definitive standard against which all gender questions shall be judged. This means that femaleness, as well as all that becomes associated with it, is defined by the dominant patriarchal gender schema as inherently flawed and lacking.

### Gender Role Behaviors and Attitudes

The clusters of social definitions used to identify persons by gender are collectively known as femininity and masculinity. Masculine characteristics are used to identify persons as males, while feminine ones are used as signifiers for

femaleness. People use femininity or masculinity to claim and communicate their membership in their assigned, or chosen, sex or gender. Others recognize our sex or gender more on the basis of these characteristics than on the basis of sex characteristics, which are usually largely covered by clothing in daily life.

These two clusters of attributes are most commonly seen as mirror images of one another with masculinity usually characterized by dominance and aggression, and femininity by passivity and submission. A more even-handed description of the social qualities subsumed by femininity and masculinity might be to label masculinity as generally concerned with egoistic dominance and femininity as striving for cooperation or communion.<sup>19</sup> Characterizing femininity and masculinity in such a way does not portray the two clusters of characteristics as being in a hierarchical relationship to one another but rather as being two different approaches to the same question, that question being centrally concerned with the goals, means, and use of power. Such an alternative conception of gender roles captures the hierarchical and competitive masculine thirst for power, which can, but need not, lead to aggression, and the feminine quest for harmony and communal well-being, which can, but need not, result in passivity and dependence.

Many activities and modes of expression are recognized by most members of society as feminine. Any of these can be, and often are, displayed by persons of either gender. In some cases, cross gender behaviors are ignored by observers, and therefore do not compromise the integrity of a person's gender display. In other cases, they are labeled as inappropriate gender role behaviors. Although these behaviors are closely linked to sexual status in the minds and experiences of most people, research shows that dominant persons of either gender tend to use influence tactics and verbal styles usually associated with men and masculinity, while subordinate persons, of either gender, tend to use those considered to be the province of women.<sup>20</sup> Thus it seems likely that many aspects of masculinity and femininity are the result, rather than the cause, of status inequalities.

Popular conceptions of femininity and masculinity instead revolve around hierarchical appraisals of the "natural" roles of males and females. Members of both genders are believed to share many of the same human characteristics, although in different relative proportions; both males and females are popularly thought to be able to do many of the same things, but most activities are divided into suitable and unsuitable categories for each gender class. Persons who perform the activities considered appropriate for another gender will be expected to perform them poorly; if they succeed adequately, or even well, at their endeavors, they may be rewarded with ridicule or scorn for blurring the gender dividing line.

The patriarchal gender schema currently in use in mainstream North American society reserves highly valued attributes for males and actively supports the high evaluation of any characteristics which might inadvertently become associated with maleness. The ideology which the schema grows out of postulates that the cultural superiority of males is a natural outgrowth of the

innate predisposition of males toward aggression and dominance, which is assumed to flow inevitably from evolutionary and biological sources. Female attributes are likewise postulated to find their source in innate predispositions acquired in the evolution of the species. Feminine characteristics are thought to be intrinsic to the female faculty for childbirth and breastfeeding. Hence, it is popularly believed that the social position of females is biologically mandated to be intertwined with the care of children and a "natural" dependency on men for the maintenance of mother-child units. Thus the goals of femininity and, by implication, of all biological females are presumed to revolve around heterosexuality and maternity.<sup>21</sup>

Femininity, according to this traditional formulation, "would result in warm and continued relationships with men, a sense of maternity, interest in caring for children, and the capacity to work productively and continuously in female occupations."<sup>22</sup> This recipe translates into a vast number of prescriptions and prescriptions. Warm and continued relations with men and an interest in maternity require that females be heterosexually oriented. A heterosexual orientation requires women to dress, move, speak, and act in ways that men will find attractive. As patriarchy has reserved active expressions of power as a masculine attribute, femininity must be expressed through modes of dress, movement, speech, and action which communicate weakness, dependency, ineffectualness, availability for sexual or emotional service, and sensitivity to the needs of others.

Some, but not all, of these modes of interrelation also serve the demands of maternity and many female job ghettos. In many cases, though, femininity is not particularly useful in maternity or employment. Both mothers and workers often need to be strong, independent, and effectual in order to do their jobs well. Thus femininity, as a role, is best suited to satisfying a masculine vision of heterosexual attractiveness.

Body postures and demeanors which communicate subordinate status and vulnerability to trespass through a message of "no threat" make people appear to be feminine. They demonstrate subordination through a minimizing of spatial use: people appear feminine when they keep their arms closer to their bodies, their legs closer together, and their torsos and heads less vertical than do masculine-looking individuals. People also look feminine when they point their toes inward and use their hands in small or childlike gestures. Other people also tend to stand closer to people they see as feminine, often invading their personal space, while people who make frequent appeasement gestures, such as smiling, also give the appearance of femininity. Perhaps as an outgrowth of a subordinate status and the need to avoid conflict with more socially powerful people, women tend to excel over men at the ability to correctly interpret, and effectively display, nonverbal communication cues.<sup>23</sup>

Speech characterized by inflections, intonations, and phrases that convey nonaggression and subordinate status also make a speaker appear more feminine. Subordinate speakers who use more polite expressions and ask more questions in conversation seem more feminine. Speech characterized by sounds

of higher frequencies are often interpreted by listeners as feminine, childlike, and ineffectual.<sup>24</sup> Feminine styles of dress likewise display subordinate status through greater restriction of the free movement of the body, greater exposure of the bare skin, and an emphasis on sexual characteristics. The more gender distinct the dress, the more this is the case.

Masculinity, like femininity, can be demonstrated through a wide variety of cues. Pleck has argued that it is commonly expressed in North American society through the attainment of some level of proficiency at some, or all, of the following four main attitudes of masculinity. Persons who display success and high status in their social group, who exhibit "a manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance" and "the aura of aggression, violence, and daring," and who conscientiously avoid anything associated with femininity are seen as exuding masculinity.<sup>25</sup> These requirements reflect the patriarchal ideology that masculinity results from an excess of testosterone, the assumption being that androgens supply a natural impetus toward aggression, which in turn impels males toward achievement and success. This vision of masculinity also reflects the ideological stance that ideal maleness (masculinity) must remain unattained by female (feminine) pollutants.

Masculinity, then, requires of its actors that they organize themselves and their society in a hierarchical manner so as to be able to explicitly quantify the achievement of success. The achievement of high status in one's social group requires competitive and aggressive behavior from those who wish to obtain it. Competition which is motivated by a goal of individual achievement, or egoistic dominance, also requires of its participants a degree of emotional insensitivity to feelings of hurt and loss in defeated others, and a measure of emotional insularity to protect oneself from becoming vulnerable to manipulation by others. Such values lead those who subscribe to them to view feminine persons as "born losers" and to strive to eliminate any similarities to feminine people from their own personalities. In patriarchally organized societies, masculine values become the ideological structure of the society as a whole. Masculinity thus becomes "innately" valuable and femininity serves a counter-puntal function to delineate and magnify the hierarchical dominance of masculinity.

Body postures, speech patterns, and styles of dress which demonstrate and support the assumption of dominance and authority convey an impression of masculinity. Typical masculine body postures tend to be expansive and aggressive. People who hold their arms and hands in positions away from their bodies, and who stand, sit, or lie with their legs apart—thus maximizing the amount of space that they physically occupy—appear most physically masculine. Persons who communicate an air of authority or a readiness for aggression by standing erect and moving forcefully also tend to appear more masculine. Movements that are abrupt and stiff, communicating force and threat rather than flexibility and cooperation, make an actor look masculine. Masculinity can also be conveyed by stern or serious facial expressions that suggest minimal receptivity to the influence of others, a characteristic which is

an important element in the attainment and maintenance of egoistic dominance.<sup>26</sup>

Speech and dress which likewise demonstrate or claim superior status are also seen as characteristically masculine behavior patterns. Masculine speech patterns display a tendency toward expansiveness similar to that found in masculine body postures. People who attempt to control the direction of conversations seem more masculine.<sup>27</sup> Those who tend to speak more loudly, use less polite and more assertive forms, and tend to interrupt the conversations of others more often also communicate masculinity to others. Styles of dress which emphasize the size of upper body musculature, allow freedom of movement, and encourage an illusion of physical power and a look of easy physicality all suggest masculinity. Such appearances of strength and readiness to action serve to create or enhance an aura of aggressiveness and intimidation central to an appearance of masculinity. Expansive postures and gestures combine with these qualities to insinuate that a position of secure dominance is a masculine one.

Gender role characteristics reflect the ideological contentions underlying the dominant gender schema in North American society. That schema leads us to believe that female and male behaviors are the result of socially directed hormonal instructions which specify that females will want to have children and will therefore find themselves relatively helpless and dependent on males for support and protection. The schema claims that males are innately aggressive and competitive and therefore will dominate over females. The social hegemony of this ideology ensures that we are all raised to practice gender roles which will confirm this vision of the nature of the sexes. Fortunately, our training to gender roles is neither complete nor uniform. As a result, it is possible to point to multitudinous exceptions to, and variations on, these themes. Biological evidence is equivocal about the source of gender roles,<sup>28</sup> psychological androgyny is a widely accepted concept.<sup>29</sup> It seems most likely that gender roles are the result of systematic power imbalances based on gender discrimination.<sup>30</sup>

### Gendered Values

Feminine people experience, and therefore understand, the world from a very different status position than do masculine persons. Their differing access to power and privilege engender in them different value systems, priorities, and goals. Many theorists have suggested that the early childhood experiences of boys and girls begin the process of shaping them into their assigned gender roles by creating deep psychological needs in individuals which predispose them toward the social roles into which they will be encouraged to grow.

Nancy Chodorow hypothesized that the primary emotional bonds of all children are the ones they first had with their mothers. She suggested that the closeness of these first bonds acts as a largely unconscious model for people in the relationships they form in later life. She maintained that the desire to

recreate mother-child bonds is a motive force behind attitudes of both masculinity and femininity. Chodorow argued that femininity revolves around the need to replicate the primary symbiotic bonds experienced by young girl children with their mothers. She also suggested that masculinity stems, in part, from the need to reproduce the one-on-one emotional closeness lost to young male children as they are forced to reject their bonds to their mothers and cleave to social definitions of masculinity. Chodorow's argument essentially states that our emotional lives are driven by needs to feel symbiotically attached to other persons in the way that we all once felt, however briefly, with our mothers. But because of the different gender role training that males and females receive from the moment of birth onward, both the symbiotic stage and the separation-individuation processes are experienced differently by the two sexes. Therefore our attempts to recreate our infantile states, and our adult relational needs, reflect these differences.

The men that boys become strive, on one level, to duplicate the emotional closeness and security of their earlier mother-child bonds within the privacy of their emotionally intimate relationships. On another level, masculine people suffer from a need to assert their masculinity through independence from women, and freedom from dependency in any guise.<sup>31</sup> The role of masculinity, therefore, requires of those who wish to enjoy its privileges, that they regard vulnerability to other people as a dangerous weakness at the same time as they crave emotional intimacy. These conflicting needs make emotionally intimate relationships very problematic. It is difficult, if not impossible, for people to conduct satisfying intimate relationships when they are suspicious of emotional intimacy. The recreation of the closeness of a mother-child bond is therefore stymied by the successful practice of masculinity, because masculinity is, in essence, about separation and emotionally distant relationships.

Feminine persons, who tend to grow out of more secure and enduring attachments to their mothers, also wish to simulate the experience of union in their intimate relationships. Heterosexual women, however, are often frustrated in their attempts to find intimacy with the men in their lives, because of the conflicting masculine needs to receive unconditional love and to assert independence from the source of that love. Women therefore tend to turn to other women and, more commonly, to their own children for a reconstruction of the love they received as children. But the recreation of a mother-child bond through motherhood is not an entirely satisfactory solution. Those women who become mothers do not have the opportunity to feel themselves playing the desired role of child in the mother-child dyad. For this feeling, they must have the cooperation of another adult. Hence women's often frustrated desire for intimacy with men can be supplemented, but not fully replaced, by emotional intimacy with children.

Chodorow argues that in societies where women do virtually all early child care, and in which there exists a dichotomized, male-dominated, and hierarchical gender schema, femininity has two major components: maternal and heterosexual. The heterosexual component of femininity serves as a means for

women to achieve both maternity and some satisfaction of their needs for emotional intimacy. Femininity, as characterized by Chodorow, is motivated by a need for union with others, a need which is socially channeled toward childbearing and heterosexuality.

The socially dominant needs of masculinity also require that femininity be defined heterosexually so that the masculine psychological goal of surrogate mothering for grown males may be accomplished.<sup>32</sup> Child rearing is an integral part of femininity which, although it may serve other important masculine goals of egoistic dominance,<sup>33</sup> is often only a tolerated impediment to the emotional goals of masculinity. Masculinity then might be characterized as a cluster of psychological needs which vibrate with the conflict between a largely unconscious need for emotional submersion and a continuously socially reinforced gender role need for independence.

Not all females equally accept the feminine role. Some females reject the heterosexual component of the female role without abandoning an interest in the recreation of the mother-child bond. Many women turn directly to other women, rather than to children, for an approximation of the sort of love that they recall from their childhoods. Many women desire, and do have, children without forming heterosexual bonds to men. Many women form loving bonds with other women and children in non-heterosexual family groups. Concerning these other ways of satisfying the need for intimacy and union, Adrienne Rich has asked:

If women are the earliest sources of emotional caring and nurture for both female and male children, it would seem logical from a feminist perspective at least, to pose the following questions: whether the search for love and tenderness in both sexes does not originally lead toward women; *why in fact would women ever redirect that search*; why species survival, the means of impregnation and emotional/erotic relationships should ever become so rigidly identified with each other; and why such violent strictures should be found necessary to enforce women's total emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to men. (Emphasis in the original)<sup>34</sup>

The answers to these questions might be found in an analysis which focuses on the masculine needs of motherly attention and egoistic independence within a morality which allows the assertion of masculine needs to dominate over a more cooperative balancing of masculine and feminine goals.

Catharine Mackinnon analyzed heterosexuality as a defining characteristic of femininity, and hence the social meaning of femaleness. She argued that social recognition of femaleness is defined entirely within sexual terms. More specifically, she proposed that to be seen as female one must be heterosexual, and that to claim femaleness and not be heterosexually within the power of males is to be in defiance of the social meaning of femaleness.<sup>35</sup> Femininity, from this perspective, can be seen as a structure designed for the purpose of satisfying the egoistic needs of males for dominance, and heterosexuality can be seen as a component of femininity which ensures that females are accessible to those who need and demand patriarchal power. It is through the institution



of heterosexuality that females remain in intimate and continued contact with the people who require them to function in support of masculinity. The institution of heterosexuality ensures that females never stray far from a masculine reminder of patriarchal definitions of femininity.

Masculinity is less rigidly defined in terms of heterosexuality. Although masculinity requires access to the sexuality of women, it does not pivot around that sexuality in the same way as the feminine role does. Masculinity has other dimensions which can be sufficient to independently delineate one as male. Outwardly directed states are more important to masculinity than are emotional or home-centered interests. Economic achievement, bureaucratic power, physical strength, aggression, and emotional toughness are major indicators of masculinity;<sup>36</sup> heterosexuality is a minor indicator. Insufficient or nonexistent heterosexuality will cast a doubt on a person's masculinity,<sup>37</sup> but if other more outwardly directed qualities are strongly in evidence, the negative effect of a defective heterosexuality may be diminished or erased.

Thus, although adult femininity and masculinity share common elements, the function of those elements is quite different. Both masculinity and femininity are in part defined through their heterosexual and child-caring roles, but those roles carry very different values in their applications to the lives of men and women. The feminine role, to a great degree, derives from the need of the masculine role for support functions. Masculinity requires emotional nurturing from a quasi-maternal source; femininity is dedicated to satisfying that requirement. Masculinity further requires independence from that quasi-maternal source of emotional stability, and to this end the dominant patriarchal gender schema attributes greater masculinity to outwardly reaching, emotionally cool, achievement activities; and greater femininity to the child rearing which femininity offers as an alternative source of emotional intimacy to those who find themselves emotionally abandoned by their masculine partners.

These different motivations and statuses result in different moral standards for feminine and masculine persons, different styles of interaction based on differing standards of right and wrong, differing value systems, and differing assumptions about the motivations and goals of others. More masculine people, who tend to relate to the world on the basis of an assumption of the separation of individuals and place a high moral value on the results of separation, find intimacy threatening. More feminine people, who tend to value and strive for interactive styles and situations which are based in a desire for attachment and communion, place the highest value on caring for the needs and feelings of others. As a result of these differences, women tend to approach moral questions and problems within a context of conflicting responsibilities, while men tend to approach these same situations as questions of conflicting rights.<sup>38</sup>

Masculinity fosters an ethic wherein separate and independent individuals assert their rights within a set of laws which provide guidelines for resolving whose competing interests will take precedence when conflicts arise. It is

understood as inevitable and fair, in such a system of justice, that there will exist a hierarchy of rights and individuals. Where separation is the theme, order is the method.

Femininity demands an approach to questions of morality from another perspective. Feminine morality is predicated on the desire for the greatest communal good for the greatest number of people. Feminine justice is based in an ethic of caring for others and directs conflicts to be resolved through a minimizing of power differences. Where attachment is the theme, empathy is the method.

An aggressive assertion of power sustains a masculine ethic of domination through rights, while a contextual and supportive balancing of power through empathy and nurturance underlies the feminine ethic of cooperation. In North American patriarchal society, aggressive masculine striving for egoistic dominance backed by a patriarchal social, political, and economic reality ensures the negative social valuation of femininity, the marginal status of femaleness, and the subordination of the ethic of cooperation.

### Gender Role Strain

When people come together in social exchanges, they bring with them the sum of their experiences to that point, the cognitive schemata they used to make sense of those experiences, and the results of the application of the latter to the former. Each individual in social interaction acts, and perceives the actions of others, from the perspective of their own gender role values, training, and experience. All persons in society are constantly engaged in an ad hoc process of negotiation aimed at interpreting experience and developing shared meanings. Each of these interactions is built upon an exchange of social cues which individuals use to construct their understandings of the meanings of actions, words, and events. Such dyadic and small group negotiations of meaning take place within a larger shared contextual framework made up of the cognitive schemata and norms of a society. All interpretations of interactions between members of a society are normally understood within that larger context at the same time as cognitive schemata are applied idiosyncratically and subjectively to everyday events.

Social actors simultaneously receiving information from others are also attempting to project information about themselves which both reflects their self-images and conforms to their understandings of the requirements of their social setting.<sup>39</sup> This process is open-ended, to some degree, as people are often willing to reformulate earlier conclusions as new information suggests a more "sensible" interpretation of prior events.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, all members of society are social actors attempting to manage the impressions that they make on others, so that they might be perceived in the most advantageous light possible.

Individuals are able to understand social experiences only within the restrictions imposed on them by their own frames of reference, or from within the boundaries of their own cognitive schemata.<sup>41</sup> To simplify and organize

experience so as to make it more manageable, people call upon a loosely organized commonsense "stock of knowledge at hand,"<sup>42</sup> which they presume that "anyone like us necessarily knows."<sup>43</sup> Such a stock of knowledge constitutes a set of cognitive schemata that offer them guidelines around which they may structure their perceptions. Together, people involved in face-to-face interactions strive to develop a shared understanding of the meaning of their experiences through an ongoing interactive process, which is actually a subtle bargaining process about whose version of reality will become accepted as the working definition in an interaction.<sup>44</sup>

When two individuals meet they must establish certain facts about themselves as a basis for the smooth progress of their interaction. As all individuals in society are presumed to belong to gender groups which are governed by certain etiquettes and proprieties, adult members of society generally consider that a social failure has occurred if a person's gender is not displayed obviously, immediately, and consistently.

A subtle but powerful process of interaction revolves around the cueing and countercueing of gender display. Members of society signal to one another, through their simple everyday talk and actions, the complex message which is an unmistakable gender.<sup>45</sup> Social actors exchange this information through both direct and indirect means of communication. Persons put forward presentations which they would like to have accepted by their audiences as the "true" state of affairs. Observers respond in ways which indicate either acceptance or the need for further negotiations to establish a mutually acceptable definition of their situation. In the case of gender attributions, these cues and responses are largely nonverbal, but vast in number. And because, as Goffman maintained, "any scene . . . can be defined as an occasion for the depiction of gender difference, and in any scene a resource can be found for effecting this display,"<sup>46</sup> there may be no plausible excuse for adults to fail to properly display their gender.

Children, on the other hand, who are young enough to be conceivably still learning the proper application of their society's gender schema, are usually benignly tolerated if they fail to display gender behaviors appropriate to their assigned genders. But this tolerance is not evenly distributed between the two gender classes. Masculinity would seem to be more highly valued in children than is femininity. Boys are strongly encouraged toward masculinity, while masculine behavior in female children is tolerated as quite harmless, perhaps even salubrious. Feminine behavior in male children, on the other hand, is only poorly tolerated and often seen as a cause for alarm,<sup>47</sup> while femininity is valued but not required in prepubescent girls.

Girl children who exhibit masculine behaviors are colloquially known as "tomboys," boy children who display femininity are called "sissies." Both parents and peers show strong disapproval of femininity in boys, the label "sissy" carrying with it significant social stigma. On the other hand, "tomboy" is used in a tongue-in-cheek pejorative way when applied to prepubescent girls. There almost seems to be a guarded respect for girls who enjoy some of the

privileges and skills which are usually reserved for the socially dominant gender. Masculine girls call forth an amused, bittersweet admiration for their striving to socially "better" themselves. By contrast, feminine boys evoke, in most people, a disdain for their seeming disregard for the superior opportunities and privileges available to them. Masculinity in children then, as in adults,<sup>48</sup> is more highly valued than femininity, regardless of the gender of the children exhibiting it.

Children learn the greater value of masculine behaviors and the lesser value of feminine ones by observing the actions of the adults around them. Although children do receive a great deal of social training as to the "correct" ways for boys and girls to act, they also receive the message of the dominant gender schema that maleness is the standard against which all things associated with gender are measured. Thus, children learn that to be masculine is better than to be feminine: to be male and masculine is to be best; to be female and masculine is to be second best; to be female and feminine is to be a "good girl," but second class; and to be male and feminine is to be a traitor. Masculine males take full advantage of their superior social options, and so gain the greatest social approval and rewards. Masculine females can improve their social status by acquiring some of the characteristic behavior patterns of men, thereby cueing others to grant them some of the respect and privileges usually reserved for men. Feminine females behave in accordance with their prescribed social roles. They therefore earn social approval for their conformity, but the role they perform affords them fewer rights and privileges than masculinity does. Feminine males forfeit many of the special advantages usually associated with maleness, because they not only fail to cue for them, but also compromise the appearance of innate, biologically based, male rights to socially dominant roles. They therefore elicit disrespect and distrust from most members of society, because they not only turn their backs on their own opportunities for social power, but they also threaten the credibility of other men's claims of "natural" superiority. Thus, it is not cross gender role behavior that is censured so much as it is gender behavior which lowers an individual's or a gender class's social value.

Cognitive developmental theorists have suggested that people desire to learn and conform to what is appropriate for their gender grouping. This process of identification and modeling is complicated by the diversity in gender schema definitions. There may exist severe, or subtle, disjunctions between the gender schemata projected by various "significant others," or between "significant others" and a person's "generalized other." As the actual prescriptions and proscriptions of gender schemata are constantly in flux and undergoing challenge from competing social and cultural ideological sources, individual representatives of society subscribe to different individual versions of a gender schema which in itself contains confusions and contradictions. The media, peers, schools, workplaces, and families may deliver sharply competing messages about desirable gender role behaviors. When social agents transmit their gender schemata, they are rarely clear and uncontradictory.

Further complications arise despite the best intentions and abilities of people to subscribe to a gender schema as they understand it. People also carry within themselves certain individual dispositions and talents. It is not uncommon that gender role requirements as outlined in a gender schema conflict with the personalities, talents, and dispositions of growing and changing people. Such conflicts can result in gender role strain, wherein individuals find it difficult to negotiate their assigned gender role as they understand it.<sup>49</sup> In such situations the disjuncture between a person's "I" and "me" can become uncomfortably large, and a sense of oneself as a coherent "self" might become endangered. Such conflict might result in an internalized power struggle between one's "I" and one's "generalized other." In other words, when people do not see themselves as they believe others see them, and as they themselves believe they ought to be, personality disintegration is possible.

Persons experiencing such conflict have several avenues open to them. They might adjust their behavior, so that others can see them more as they see themselves. They might choose to alter their definitions of themselves so that they see themselves as others see them. Or they may shift their locus of social standards to reside with a different social group whose criteria coincide more exactly with their personal self-images. This last option can allow people suffering from an I/me conflict to align the way that other people see them with the way that they see themselves by changing their "significant others" to persons whose values match their own.

The first option has certain inherent limitations. When persons perceive that their private definitions of themselves vary significantly from their public image, they may attempt to display their private selves more openly in an attempt to bring others to see them as they "really" are. But one must be cautious not to display attributes which might bring social censure; therefore individuals who perceive themselves to be experiencing a conflict between their public and private selves may be able to use this option only in limited ways if their private self-image is not in conformity with social norms.

Another way to negotiate a more perfect conjunction of "I" and "me" is to adjust one's personal self-image to match more closely the way one is seen by others. This approach has the advantage of running the least risk of offending public sensibilities. It is safer in that social expectations are being met rather than questioned, but it carries with it the greatest challenge to the self because it necessitates alteration of the "I," the most deeply rooted and intensely personal part of the self.

The method for partially relieving gender role strain which least threatens the self, and most effectively avoids conflict and social disapproval, revolves around the constituency of the "generalized other." People may choose to allow the standards of certain individuals or ideologies to take prominence within their cognitive schemata. A gender schema need not be one's pre-eminent cognitive schema, nor must it be constructed according to the demands of the dominant ideologies of society. Individuals or groups of individuals may choose either to give other cognitive schemata dominance

within their own cognitive frameworks, or to minimize their use of gender schemata whenever possible in their own lives and social interactions. Gender role strain might therefore be relieved by a willful effort to shift one's cognitive schema priorities.

Such a shift could be reinforced and bolstered by a similar effort to shift one's "significant others" and "generalized others" to include persons of similar persuasions. Gender role strain may then be lessened to the degree that individuals are able to restrict their social contacts to persons of similar minds. Such a strategy would be limited in its effectiveness to the same degree that any social deviation might be. Major social deviations are rarely tolerated easily, and individual or group deviation from gender schema prescriptions can be perceived as extremely threatening to a social order which is, to a large degree, predicated on the use of gender as a major cognitive schema. Those who threaten the social order can be, and often are, severely punished for their transgressions.

Each option must be understood within a larger social context. Gender schemata exist in society as widely accepted ways of making sense out of everyday experience; everyone may not agree on exactly how a schema is to be defined but, in general, gender schemata are universally used cognitive techniques and, as such, are a most basic part of social sense. If individuals were to contradict, in behavior, speech, attitude, or in any other way, the basic tenets of the gender schema of their society, they would be challenging a widely accepted social definition of sense. One result of such a situation might be that such individuals would simply be misunderstood. If such misunderstanding were viewed benignly, there might be no further implications. Were this behavior aschematic enough, it might be considered dangerous, criminal, or even insane. The ramifications in such situations could be severe.

Persons who find themselves unable to conform satisfactorily to their assigned gender role may become socially stigmatized for such failure. Normally, in North American society, when people join together in social situations, they expect from one another a certain level of social collusion so that all participants in an interaction will be able to share a common meaning and understand the intentions and actions of one another. The most generally applicable way to establish a common language of communication is to agree to collectively subscribe to elements of the dominant social language. This dominant social language is composed not only of words but also of a shared understanding of the meanings of nonverbal communications and by a set of values and attitudes.<sup>50</sup> Persons who do not, willingly or unwillingly, share in these common creations of meaning become people who carry with them a stigma. Persons who carry a stigma come to be seen by others as "not quite human," and they can thus become partially or fully disqualified from social acceptance.<sup>51</sup>

People who are aware that they have a disjuncture in their gendered selves between their "I," their "me," and their "generalized other" must manage themselves in such a way so as to minimize any possible stigma which might

result from others becoming aware of their situation. Such people may attempt to disguise or compensate for the offending parts of their gender behavior which they feel unable or unwilling to modify. Individuals who take such an approach carry with them at all times the awareness that they are secretly in transgression of social laws. At any time they may become exposed not only as persons with stigma but also as persons engaged in deceit.

Inappropriate gender role behaviors are treated differently depending on the ways in which they are inappropriate. Minor transgressions of prescribed gender roles normally elicit social ridicule or chastisement. More major transgression can earn one the status of mentally ill. Sufficient variation from the norm can cause one to forfeit the gender attribution which they would normally expect on the basis of their sex and gender identity. Most extremely, chronic transgressions of gender role norms can lead to insecurity in, or even loss of, one's gender/sex identity. Hence, the power of gender role norms lies in the threat of possible loss of basic identity as a result of insufficient conformity to their demands. This power is possible only because of the strength of the dominant gender schema to define the core person in terms of these behaviors.

Thus, stigmatized persons, who believe themselves to be stigmatized for reasons beyond their control, have few options open to them. They may allow their nonconforming "I's" to be fully visible to public scrutiny and become subject to the full force of social affront at social nonconformity. They may attempt to hide whatever offending behavior that they are able to and run the risk of exposure and the subsequent further discredit associated with falsehood, as well as suffer the anxiety of leading a life mired in duplicity. Or they may allow their stigma to become public while safeguarding themselves by limiting their social contact to persons who will be sympathetic to their situation. In any case, full social acceptance and peace of mind are not easily available to persons who do not conform to the requirements of the "generalized others" among whom they live.