

Becoming Gendered

Knowledge Challenge:

- To what extent do mothers and fathers interact differently with children?
- How do ego boundaries affect approaches to relationships?
- What does it mean to grow up masculine or feminine in the twenty-first century?

“Mommy, when is the good fairy going to come with her magic wand and change my penis into a vagina?” (My Secret Self, 2009). That’s the question that two-year-old Jazz Jennings posed to her mother. Born with male genitalia, Jazz says she knew from the start that she was a girl. Explaining it in an interview, she said, “I have a girl brain and a boy body” (My Secret Self, 2009). At first Jazz’s parents, particularly her father, resisted Jazz’s declaration of gender identity. They thought their youngest son was just going through a phase. But, no: Liking dresses and dolls was not a phase that Jazz would grow out of. Instead of Jazz’s changing, her family—mother, father, twin brothers, and older sister—changed to recognize Jazz as a daughter and sister rather than a son and brother.

Jazz and her family made the decision to be not just open, but public about Jazz’s identity and the challenges that she and the family faced. Sometimes joined by other family members, Jazz has appeared on *60 Minutes*, the *Rosie Show*, and a documentary on Oprah’s OWN network. By the time she was an adolescent, Jazz had started the Transkids Purple Rainbow Foundation (<http://www.transkidspurpleinrainbow.org>) as a resource for other transkids and their families. Jazz also designs and sells silicone mermaid tails to raise money to support trans people (<http://jazzmergirl.wix.com/purplerainbowtails>). Why mermaid tails? Because “mermaids are not judged on body parts” so you “don’t have to worry what’s around the private area,” says Jazz (My Secret Self, 2009). Most recently, she coauthored a book about transkids for four- to eight-year-olds (Herthel, Jennings, & McNicholas, 2014).

From Chapter 2, you’ll recall that children usually achieve gender constancy by age 3, often earlier. Society and families are organized to help cisgender



Kevin Winter/Getty Images

Jazz Jennings: “I have a girl brain and a boy body.”

children achieve gender constancy, but trans children struggle to define themselves in a world that often doesn’t understand or accept their gender identities. Yet even cisgendered people face challenges in claiming a gender and learning how to perform it competently.

Before reading further, write one or two paragraphs describing what it means to you personally to be the sex and gender that you are. Later in this chapter, we’ll return to what you’ve written.

In this chapter, we explore the critically important early years of our lives. Our experiences as infants, children, and adolescents profoundly influence who we are. Although we continue to evolve throughout our lives, the foundations of our identities, including gender, are keenly shaped by the first few years of life.

Because parents are such a key influence on most people’s identities, we will examine at length how many parents’ communication teaches children the cultural gender code. We will also consider contemporary college students’ views of what it means to be a man, woman, gay, or transgender in the United States today. Their descriptions give rich insight into current prescriptions for gender—and, equally, some of the difficulties those prescriptions pose.

Gendering Communication in the Family

Families, particularly parents and stepparents, are primary influences on gender identity. To understand how families contribute to gendering children, we will first elaborate on the largely unconscious dynamics at work in gender development, which we discussed briefly in Chapter 2. Second, we will draw on social learning, cognitive development, and symbolic interaction theories to examine more overt ways in which children learn gender in families.

Unconscious Processes

The conscious realm of human experience does not fully explain human development. Insight into unobservable, yet very important, unconscious dynamics comes primarily from psychoanalytic theories, which claim that core identity, including **gender identity**, is shaped in the early years of life.

GABE/GABBY

Growing up was not a piece of cake for me. My father was in the Army and he embraced a very rigid code of masculinity. Since I was five, I liked to dress up in my sister's clothes. By the time I was 12, I was stuffing tissues in my shirt so I looked like I had breasts—always in the privacy of my own room, of course. Dad expected me to be a fullback and I wanted to be a ballerina. As I said, not easy.

Gender Identity

As part of developing an overall identity, each of us has to achieve a gender identity, which is a person's subjective sense of his or her gender. Psychoanalytic theory originated with Sigmund Freud, who lived from 1856 until 1939. Freud claimed that "anatomy is destiny," by which he meant that biology, particularly the genitals, determines with which parent a child will identify and, thus, how the child's psyche will develop. Freud believed that children of both sexes focus on the penis as a symbol of power. Boys identify with their fathers, who have penises, whereas girls recognize their similarity to their mothers, who do not have penises. Freud theorized that girls regard their mothers as responsible for their "lack" of penises, whereas boys view their fathers as having the power to castrate them.

EILEEN

I don't buy this stuff about penis envy. I've never envied my brother, his penis. I remember, when we were both little, we took baths together sometimes, and I saw that he was made differently than I was. I thought it looked strange, but I didn't want it myself. But I do remember being jealous of him, or of the freedoms my parents allowed him but not me. They let him go off all day long to play, but I had to stay in the yard unless my mother was with me. He could play rough and get dirty, but I'd get a real fussin' if I did. I remember wishing I were a boy so that I could do all of the fun things, but I didn't wish I had a penis. Definitely not.

As interesting as Freud's theory is, there is limited empirical support for his beliefs that girls have penis envy and boys fear castration. Despite rejecting some of Freud's ideas, current psychoanalytic theorists agree with the basic claim that families play a critical role in the formation of gender identity. In infancy, children of both sexes tend to depend on and identify with the person who takes care of them. Usually, this is a woman, often the mother who is more likely to take time off from work when a child is born or adopted. Although many fathers in our era are committed to active involvement in their children's lives, mothers still spend more time with children than fathers (Hallstein & O'Reilly, 2012; Parker & Wang, 2013; Valenti, 2012). Thus, children of both sexes generally form their first identification with an adult woman.

Yet, their common identification with a female does not mean that boys and girls pursue similar paths to develop gender identity. Around the age of three, male development and female development diverge dramatically. You'll recall from cognitive development theory that this is the age at which gender constancy is usually secured, such that children realize that their sex is an unchanging, continuous part of their identity. For most girls, concrete, daily interactions with mothers or other female caregivers crystallize a sense of self within a close relationship.

To develop masculine gender identity, however, boys need to identify with a male. Boys who have close relationships with fathers or other adult males have role models to help them define their own masculine identity. However, the process of defining personal masculinity is complicated for boys whose fathers are not highly involved in their everyday lives. Today, 27% of children live apart from fathers (Raeburn, 2014).

ADRIENNE

I remember watching my mother fix her hair and makeup in the morning. I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world, and I wanted to be just like her. Many days, I went into her dressing room when she was busy downstairs and practiced putting on makeup and fixing my hair just like she did.

For boys who lack a strong, personal relationship with an adult male, masculine gender can be elusive and difficult to grasp (Tyre, 2009). This may help explain why many boys define their masculinity predominantly in negative terms—as not feminine, not female, not like mother. By extension, this may be the source of young boys' tendency to devalue the feminine in general (“Ugh, girls are icky.”), a pattern not paralleled by young girls' views of masculinity. Young boys' vigorous contempt for anything feminine may be a way to assure themselves that they are truly masculine (Chodorow, 1989).

RICH

My father left us before I was even a year old, so I didn't know him at all. My mom worked all day and was too tired to date or anything else, so there wasn't a man around. I tried to help Mom, but she'd tell me I didn't have to do this stuff, because I was “her little man.” I used to watch Mom doing stuff around the house, and I'd think, “That's not what I'm supposed to do,” but I had a lot of trouble figuring out

what it was that I was supposed to do. I just knew it wasn't girl stuff. Then, I got a Big Brother through a program at school. He was 17, and he spent most every Saturday with me and sometimes a while after school during the week. Michael was great. He'd let me hang out with him, and he'd show me how to do stuff like play ball and use tools to make things. Finally, I had a sense of what I was supposed to be like and what I should do. Michael really helped me figure out who I was.

Although boys and girls engage in many of the same activities, there are also patterned differences in what they are encouraged to do. Young girls are often praised for being “Mommy’s helper” and interacting with their mothers and younger siblings in the home. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to be praised for being independent and engaging in competitive play with other children. Boys’ social development typically occurs in larger groups with temporary and changing memberships, whereas for many girls identity develops within ongoing, personal relationships with family members and regular playmates. These different paths of social development encourage boys to see themselves as independent and able to meet physical challenges and girls to see themselves as involved in continuing relationships with others.

Building on this foundation, many girls and women continue to prioritize close relationships throughout their lives. Because most boys develop masculine identities that require separating from their initial relationship with their mothers, and because they tend to interact in activity-specific groups with changing members, many of them grow into men who define themselves relatively independently of others.

Children in single-parent families may have difficulty finding available models of both sexes (Raeburn, 2014). There has been little research on what happens when men, not women, are solo parents, perhaps because single-father families are less common than single-mother families. Preliminary research suggests that single-father families can be highly cohesive and that father–child discussions are more elaborate and less competitive than discussions between fathers and children in families with mothers as well as fathers (Galvin, 2006).

EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

Superheroes and Slackers

When searching for role models, boys are not limited to the men who are actually in their lives. They also have media, which offer images of men. But how diverse are these images? Both traditional and social media offer boys pretty limited role models (Halberstam, 2012; Kimmel, 2013). Interviews with nearly 700 boys aged 4 to 18 revealed two primary media characters with

which young males most identify (Lamb, Brown, & Tappan, 2009):

The superhero, who is aggressive and often violent, has high-powered weapons, and is disrespectful, if not exploitive, of women.

The slacker, who is amusing, doesn’t like school or responsibility, and has no plans for his life.

TAKE A STAND: To what extent do your experiences confirm or challenge these as dominant media images of men today?

Ego Boundaries

At the same time that we construct our gender identity, we simultaneously form **ego boundaries** (Chodorow, 1989; Surrey, 1983). An ego boundary is the point at which an individual stops and the rest of the world begins. It distinguishes the self—more or less distinctly—from everyone and everything else. Because ego boundaries are linked to gender identity and evolve concurrently with it, masculine and feminine ego boundaries tend to differ. Individuals who develop feminine gender identities, which emphasize interrelatedness with others, tend to have relatively permeable ego boundaries that do not entail rigid separation from others.

VINCE

My girlfriend is so strange about her friends. Like, the other night I went by her apartment, and she was all upset and crying. When I asked her what was wrong, she told me Linda, her best friend, had just been dumped by her boyfriend. I said she acted like it was her who'd broken up, not Linda, and she didn't need to be so upset. She got even more upset and said it felt like her problem too; couldn't I understand what Linda was going through? I said I could, but that she wasn't going through it; Linda was. She told me it was the same thing because when you're really close to somebody else you hurt when they hurt. It didn't make sense to me, but maybe this concept of ego boundaries is what that's all about.

The relatively permeable ego boundaries associated with femininity may partially explain why many girls and women tend to experience the feelings of those close to them almost as their own (Hall, 2006; Hartman, 1993; Wood, 2013). It may also explain why some women become so involved in helping others that they neglect their own needs. Finally, this may shed light on the tendency of many women to feel responsible for others and for situations that they do not create or control. When the lines between self and others are blurry, it's hard to make a clear distinction between your own responsibilities and needs and those of others.

Conventional masculine gender identity is premised on differentiating from a female caregiver and defining the self as “not like her.” It makes sense, then, that masculine individuals tend to have relatively firm ego boundaries. They generally have a clear sense of where they stop and others begin; they may sympathize with others but not experience others' feelings as their own. People with masculine gender identities and firm ego boundaries tend to feel secure when autonomy is high, and they may feel smothered in relationships that are extremely close. The firmer ego boundaries that usually accompany a masculine gender identity explain why, later in life, many men have fewer emotionally intimate relationships than women typically do.



Parental Communication about Gender

From Chapter 2, you'll recall that one way children learn gender roles is by receiving positive and negative reinforcements for various behaviors (social learning theory) and through observing and emulating others whom they see as models (cognitive development theory). Typically, girls are rewarded for being cooperative, helpful, nurturing, friendly, and polite—all qualities consistent with conventional views of femininity. Parents may also reward—or at least not punish—girls for being sensitive, athletic, and smart. For boys, rewards are more likely to come for behaving competitively, independently, and assertively.

Parents' communication toward sons and daughters often reflects the parents' gender stereotypes. A classic study showed that in just 24 hours of birth, parents responded to their babies in terms of gender stereotypes (Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974). Although male and female babies were matched for size, weight, and level of activity, parents described boys as *strong, big, active, and alert*, and described the equally large, active girls as *small, dainty, quiet, and delicate*. These findings have been replicated in more recent studies (Elliott, 2009).

MELISSA

In my family, I learned that thinking about boys was not a high priority. If I told my mama that I liked a boy or that I was afraid a boy I was dating was going to break up with me, she'd say "Get your mind off boys and on books." Mama made it very clear that I was supposed to get my education and learn to take care of myself. Period.

Some parents convey distinct messages about assertiveness and aggressiveness to sons and daughters. Research shows that parents, particularly white middle-class parents, reward verbal and physical activity, including aggression, in sons more than daughters and reward interpersonal and social skills in daughters more than sons (Mills, Nazar, & Farrell, 2002; Morrow, 2006). Because many girls are discouraged from direct, overt aggression yet still feel aggressive at times, they develop other, less direct ways of expressing aggression. We'll explore girls' ways of expressing aggression in later chapters when we discuss gender dynamics among peers.

Parents, especially fathers, encourage in children what they perceive to be gender-appropriate behaviors, fostering more independence, competitiveness, and aggression in sons and more emotional expressiveness and gentleness in daughters (Bryant & Check, 2000; Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000; Galvin, 2006). Recent research also shows that parents of young adolescents place greater importance on leadership activities and accomplishments for sons than daughters (Sandberg & Chávez, 2014). Heterosexual fathers are particularly clear in encouraging sons to be heterosexual (Solebello & Elliott, 2011).

Mothers tend to communicate with children more than fathers (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Galvin, 2006). Mothers use talk to build connections with children and to give information, advice, encouragement, and emotional support to children (Galvin, 2006; Segrin & Flora, 2005). Mothers surpass fathers in talking with children, particularly daughters, about feelings and relationships, guiding them in how to build social connections, and become emotionally competent (Galvin, 2006; Segrin & Flora, 2005). Recent research also shows that even when children are less than two years old, mothers call sons' attention to numbers and talk with sons about numbers more than they talk with daughters (Chang, Sandhofer, & Brown, 2012).

BRAD

My father took me hunting and coached me in football. He taught me to be strong around other men and to treat any woman with respect. He taught me that a real man is tough when he needs to be, loyal to friends, and protective of women.

When interacting with children, mothers typically focus on providing comfort, security, and emotional development. They engage in more eye contact and face-to-face interaction with children than do fathers, and they are more likely than fathers to hug children and tell children they love them (Blow, 2014). More than fathers, mothers tend to play with children at the children's level, which develops children's confidence and security in play.

Although fathers spend less time than mothers in one-on-one communication with children, today's fathers talk more with children than did fathers in previous generations (Bianchi et al., 2006; Pruett & Pruett, 2009; Raeburn, 2014; Tarkan, 2009). Fathers tend to engage in play that is physically stimulating and exciting, and they encourage children, especially sons, to develop skills and meet challenges (Raeburn, 2014). Fathers, more than mothers, stretch children by urging them to compete, achieve, take risks, act independently, and move beyond their current levels of ability (Luster & Okagaki, 2005; Popenoe, 1996; Raeburn, 2014; Stacey, 1996).

Another notable difference between communication typical of mothers and fathers concerns talk about sexual activity. Mothers are much more likely than fathers to discuss sex topics with children, particularly daughters (Dennis & Wood, 2012; Wilson & Koo, 2010). When mothers talk with daughters about sex, the daughters are more likely to delay sexual activity and to engage in safer sex when they decide to be sexual (Wilson & Koo, 2010). Parents also communicate gender expectations through the toys and activities they encourage for sons and

daughters. Although many parents encourage their children to play with a range of toys, some parents actively discourage their children's interest in toys and games that are associated with the other sex. For instance, boys may be persuaded not to play with dolls (other than action figures), and girls may be dissuaded from engaging in physically aggressive sports.

As we noted in Chapter 6, childhood toys and activities affect how we see ourselves and the possibilities for our lives. More “feminine” toys, such as dolls, encourage gentle, nurturing interaction with others, physical closeness, and verbal communication. More typically “masculine” toys, such as sports equipment and train sets, promote independent or competitive activities and less verbal interaction. Parents who don't want to limit their children to sex-typed toys may encounter challenges. Many stores sell girls' bikes in pink and other pastels and boys' bikes in darker colors (Abadi, 2013; Orenstein, 2011a, 2011b; Rivers & Barnett, 2011). Halloween costumes are also very sex-typed. Typical costumes for boys are based on characters who have supernatural powers, strength, and bravado whereas costumes for girls are based on characters who are brides, models, and sex objects.

Another way parents communicate gender expectations is through household chores that they assign to sons and daughters. Like toys, various tasks cultivate particular ways of seeing ourselves. Domestic chores, which are more often assigned to girls, emphasize taking care of others, whereas outdoor work and repair jobs, more typically assigned to boys, encourage independent activity.

In general, gender socialization is more rigid for boys than for girls (DeFrancisco & Chatham-Carpenter, 2000), and fathers are more insistent on gender-stereotyped toys and activities, especially for sons, than are mothers. It's more acceptable for girls to play baseball or football than for boys to play house or to cuddle dolls (Halberstam, 2012). Similarly, it's considered more suitable for girls to be strong than for boys to cry, and more acceptable for girls to act independently than for boys to need others. Overall, boys are more intensively and rigidly pushed to be masculine than girls are pushed to be feminine.

TAYLOR

My father always tried to encourage me to be strong, play sports, and do things that girls were not supposedly good at doing, like working on carpentry, for example. I tried my best to meet my father's expectations, but I often failed. Peers often teased me and called me names like “wuss” because I was never good at playing sports and because of my size. I really enjoyed watching sports, but I was afraid to even try to get on teams in middle school because I was setting myself up for failure.

Parental Modeling

Another way parents communicate gender is through modeling masculinity, femininity, and, for heterosexual parents, male–female relationships. As you will recall from Chapter 2, cognitive development theory tells us that, once children have gender constancy, they actively look for role models of their sex and use those

models to develop masculine or feminine qualities, behaviors, and so forth. For most children, parents are the single most visible and available models of masculinity and femininity. By observing parents, children often learn the roles socially prescribed for women and men. In heterosexual families that adhere to traditional sex roles, children of both sexes are likely to learn that women are supposed to nurture others, clean, cook, and show emotional sensitivity, and that men are supposed to earn money, make decisions, and be strong and emotionally controlled.

Not all families, however, adopt traditional sex roles. In fact, families in our era are highly diverse in membership and roles (Galvin, 2006; Halberstam, 2012). Many children live in single-parent families, at least for part of their lives. Another departure from tradition has to do with the breadwinner role. In the mid-1970s, approximately 40% of married women worked outside the home (Galvin, 2006). Today, 70% of children in the United States live in households in which all adults work (Coonz, 2013), and 26% of American women who are in the paid labor force and are in two-earner marriages earn more money than their male partners (Langfield, 2013; Ream, 2012). Combining single mother and two-parent households, women are the sole or primary breadwinner for 40% of U.S. households whereas they were primary earners in just 11% in 1960 (Langfield, 2013). Gay, lesbian, and transgender parents are also increasing. Whereas some same-sex partners choose to be child free, others have children or parent children from former heterosexual unions. Nearly half of first marriages end within 20 years (Stobbe, 2012). Parents who remarry often create blended families. Being part of more than one family and being able to observe multiple models of gender gives these children more diverse ideas about how families can work and how gender can be embodied.

Parents model attitudes about gender. Fathers who work out and engage in vigorous physical activities and who encourage their sons to play sports may impart the message that physical strength and skill are masculine. Fathers who encourage daughters to compete in athletics affirm that physical strength and skill are also feminine. Mothers who make disparaging remarks about their weight communicate that to be feminine is to be thin. Mothers who embody comfort with their size and appearance encourage sons and daughters not to regard physical attractiveness as the most important facet of women.

In sum, parents are major messengers about gender. For most people, parents provide gender socialization ranging from their descriptions of children to the chores they assign and the activities they encourage. Yet, gender is not just about learning society's rules. Gender is also deeply personal. Let's now translate the research we've considered into personal portraits of becoming gendered in contemporary Western society.

The Personal Side of the Gender Drama

At the beginning of this chapter, we asked you to write a paragraph or two about what it means to be the sex and gender that you are. In the pages that follow, you'll learn how other college students answer that question. As you read their responses, consider how their ideas harmonize with and depart from your own.

Growing Up Masculine

What does it mean to identify as a man in America in the twenty-first century? A first answer is that there is no single form of manhood or masculinity as we saw in Chapter 4. Although there is a dominant model of masculinity, there are also many variations on and challenges to that (Jackson & Murali, 2011; Reeser, 2010). To understand the advantages, challenges, and issues of various masculinities, let's consider what five college men have to say. In their commentaries, Mark, Aaron, Steve, Clifford, and Derek focus as much on the pressures, expectations, and constraints of manhood as its prerogatives and privileges. What these five men tell us is consistent with research (Coonz, 2013; Doyle, 1997; Kimmel, 2013; Kimmel & Messner, 2012; Lindgren & Lélievre, 2009). We'll discuss six themes of manhood in America today. Five of these were first identified by Doyle (1997).

Don't Be Feminine For many men, the most fundamental requirement for manhood is not to be feminine. At young ages many boys talk openly and expressively with friends about serious topics, including feelings (Way, 2010). Yet, as boys mature, many of them encounter pressure to “grow up,” by embodying traditional norms of masculinity. To be accepted by peers, they become less verbally expressive of feelings other than ones considered appropriate for men—anger, for example. A male who shows sensitivity or vulnerability is likely to be called sissy, mama's boy, or wimp. Peer groups pressure males to be tough, aggressive, and not feminine. The antifemale directive is at least as strong for African-American men as for European-American men (Messner, 2007; Sander 2012).

Not being like a girl means learning to “suck it up.” Youths of both sexes engage in sports and sustain injuries, yet males are less likely than females to report pain or symptoms of injuries, including life-threatening brain injuries. Prominent features of ideal masculinity today are courage, risk-taking, and the ability to withstand pain without crying, whining, or quitting (Lindgren & Lélievre, 2009).

MARK

Being a man means being strong and able to take care of yourself without whining or asking for help. Guys learn early not to be sissies. A kid who cries when the ball hits him will be called a girl. You learn or you don't have friends. It's not a big deal, just how it is.

Be Successful This is the second requirement for men. From boyhood through the teen years, boys are expected to be successful at sports and other competitive activities. Sports train boys to compete and be aggressive in an effort to win (Kimmel, 2013; Messner, 2007; Messner & Sabo, 2006). As adults, men are expected to compete to achieve status in their professions, to “make it.”

The theme of success translates into not just being good at what you do but being better than others, being Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) rather than just another player, being more powerful than your friends, pulling in a bigger

salary than your colleagues, and having a more expensive home and car than your neighbors. Many men today, like Aaron, say that being a good provider is the primary requirement for manhood—an internalized requirement that appears to cut across lines of race and economic class.

Yet supporting a family financially may not be a realistic goal for all men in the present era. Even the group that has historically fared best economically, college-educated white men, is not immune to economic downturns. In 2009, the height of the recent recession in the United States, 1 in 5 men didn't have jobs. Five years later, in 2014, 1 in 6 men in the prime working years of 25 to 54 is unemployed (Peters & Wessel, 2014).

Men who are not in the paid labor force have to find other ways of focusing their lives and defining themselves. In 2011, a record number of out-of-work fathers were caring for children: 32% regularly cared for children under 15 and 20% were primary caregivers for preschool children (Stonington, 2011). In his commentary, Steve expresses some anger about the breadwinner expectation.

AARON

The one thing I know for sure is that a man takes care of his family. My dad had no respect—zero—for his cousin who had to go on unemployment and then got a job but didn't earn enough to support his family. My dad called him "lazy," "no 'count," and "freeloader." The whole reason I'm majoring in business is because students who graduate from the business school have higher starting salaries and higher salaries down the line.

STEVE

I am sick of hearing about "male privilege." Where is it? That's what I'd like to know. I'm expected to pay for dates; girls get a free ride. I have to pay a cover charge to get into a bar; ladies' nights are freebies for girls. If the draft comes back, I could be drafted and shipped to a war; women aren't subject to the draft. I have to get a job and make money; a woman can do that, but she doesn't have to. So tell me where male privilege is in all of this.

Be Aggressive A third injunction for masculinity is to be aggressive. Boys and men are expected to take stands, be tough, and not run from confrontations. Many boys first learn this lesson in sports as coaches psych teams up with demands that they "make the other team hurt, hurt, hurt" or "make them bleed." Of course, sometimes the other team makes you hurt, and here again, sports teach masculinity by telling "boys they have to be tough" and they have to "play through the pain" (Gregory, 2007, p. 70).

In addition to symbolizing men's greater power in relation to women, sports are a way for higher-status men to exert dominance over other men (Messner, 2005). As adults, men are expected to be aggressive in their careers, taking chances, being tough, and coming out on top.

Media fuel ideals of extreme masculinity such as the oversized, muscled male figures in video games and the TV characters who are dropped into wilderness locales and must forage and rely on survival techniques. These images of "real men" lead many young boys to decide they have to toughen up to make it (Brown, Lamb, & Tappan, 2009). A recent study (Vokey, Tefft, & Tysianczyny, 2013) of advertising images in magazines targeted at men, such as *Fortune*, *Field & Stream*, *Playboy*, and *Game Informer*, found that men are most often portrayed as "hyper-masculine"—violent, tough, sexually aggressive, and dangerous.

Be Sexual The fourth element of the male role is to be interested in sex—all the time, any time. The more partners a man has and the more casually he treats them, the more of a stud he is. Cornell West (2007) notes that for black males, sexuality is particularly associated with a machismo identity and with being powerful. A man who doesn't want a lot of sex with a lot of women may find his manhood questioned by other men (Kimmel, 2008, 2013).

The pressure to be highly sexual with women is problematic for many men. Those who are gay or trans may not be attracted to women, and those who are bi may not always be interested in sex with women. In addition, a number of younger men don't want constant casual sex. National surveys (Schalet, 2011, 2012) report that romantic relationships matter to many young men, and that 40% of men between 15 and 19 have not had sex because they are waiting for the right relationship. For men who aren't into hooking up, peer pressure to measure up to the stud image can be very uncomfortable.

Be Self-Reliant Many men feel that a "real man" depends on himself, not others. Both physically and emotionally, men are expected to be controlled and self-sufficient.

CLIFFORD

Black men face their own issues with masculinity. You have to present yourself as manly and powerful. If you don't get that down, you won't be seen as a man by any other black men. For black men, being a man also means knowing that you're expected to be violent, not to support your family, and to know everything about music and sports. That's what whites expect, and they put that on me all the time. But black women are looking for men who will stand their ground—be strong and be there for them all the time. So what it means to be a black man depends on whether you look from a white or black perspective.

Michael Shelton coordinates youth camp programs for Philadelphia and is a national consultant on best practices for youth agencies. Shelton (2008) observes

that when boys at residential camps get homesick, both counselors and parents expect and sometimes coerce them to stick it out and “become a man” by staying at camp. According to Shelton, “when a male child begins to exhibit signs of homesickness, he breaks many of the cardinal rules of masculinity. He exhibits emotions of vulnerability, he does not display expected toughness, and perhaps most damaging, he shows that he has not achieved independence” (p. 44).

Embody and Transcend Traditional Views of Masculinity The sixth theme highlights the confusing messages about masculinity that confront many boys and men today. In his commentary, Derek expresses his frustration with the paradoxical expectations to be a “real man” in traditional ways and simultaneously to defy traditional views of men.

DEREK

It's really frustrating to be a man today. My girlfriend wants me to open up and show my feelings and talk about them and stuff like that. But the guys on the team get on my case whenever I show any feelings other than about winning a game. I'm supposed to be sensitive and not. I'm supposed to keep my feelings to myself and not. I'm supposed to open doors for girls and pay for dates but then respect them as equals. A lot of times it feels like a no-win situation.

For many males, a primary source of pressure to be conventionally masculine is other boys and, later, men who enforce the masculine code (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Kimmel, 2013; Messner, 2005; Sander, 2014). At the same time, many men feel other pressures—often from romantic partners, female friends, sisters, and mothers—to be more sensitive and emotionally open and to be a full partner in relationships. It's daunting to try to be both traditionally masculine and not traditionally masculine.

Some counselors believe that men's struggles to live up to social ideals of masculinity have produced an epidemic of hidden male depression. Because masculine socialization stresses emotional control and self-reliance, many men who are depressed are unwilling to seek help. They “equate seeking assistance with weakness, or the appearance of not being able to handle their own problems” (Freed & Freed, 2012, p. 36). Depression that is untreated and that does not go away on its own can be deadly—men account for nearly 80% of suicides in the United States (Freed & Freed, 2012).

Other researchers (Cross, 2008; Garcia, 2008; Kimmel, 2008, 2013) identify a new trend among young men: A resistance to growing up and maturing in the ways that their fathers and grandfathers did. Previous generations of young men left home, finished their educations, got married, started work, and became parents by age 30. Today, however, increasing numbers of young men have not sought or been able to reach those milestones by age 30. Based on interviews with hundreds of men in their 20s, most of whom had at least some college education, Kimmel (2008) concluded that many men today spend years drinking, smoking, having sex, and avoiding commitments to partners, causes, or jobs.

The first five themes of masculinity clearly reflect gender socialization in early life and lay out a blueprint for what being a man means. Yet, the sixth theme points out the contradictions between traditional and emerging views of masculinity. Individual men have options for how they define and embody masculinity in an era where gender is in flux.

Growing Up Feminine

What does it mean to be a woman in America in the twenty-first century? Two quite different narratives of femininity coexist today. One suggests that women now have it all. They are liberated from traditional roles to have careers, enjoy egalitarian marriages with partners who share in homemaking and child care, and raise amazing children; in short, they can “have it all” (Sandberg, 2013; Wood, 2010).

Simultaneously, a very different narrative tells women they may be able to get jobs, but fewer than 1 in 5 women will be given opportunities to advance to the highest levels of professional life. Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo, may make \$25 million a year (plus benefits!), but she is one of only 11 women on the most recent list of the 200 highest paid executives in the United States (Miller, 2014). Most women continue to be paid less than their male counterparts. Upon graduation, women with degrees in business earn an average of \$15,000 less than men with the same degree (Bousquet, 2012). Men with M.B.A.s earn 40% more, over time, than women with the same degree (Bousquet, 2012). Overall, male physicians make 26% more than female physicians who work the same amount and in the same specialty (Esteves-Sorenson & Snyder, 2012). Not only do women earn less than men doing comparable work, but women’s professional success is often additionally undermined by workplace policies that don’t accommodate their family responsibilities (Slaughter, 2013; Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

In addition to these broad narratives about women, media relentlessly carry the message that youth and beauty are women’s tickets to success (Barash, 2006; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Spar, 2013), but we all know those “tickets” are not lasting. Prevailing images of women are conflicting and confusing, as the commentaries by Jeanne, Mala, Bonita, Rebecca, Emily, and Sharon demonstrate. We can identify five themes in current views of femininity and womanhood.

JEANNE

Hungry. That’s what being a woman means to me. I am hungry all of the time. Either I’m dieting, or I’m throwing up because I ate too much. I am scared to death of being fat, and I’m just not made to be thin. I gain weight just by smelling food. I think about food all the time—wanting it but being afraid to eat, eating but feeling guilty. It’s a no-win situation. I’m obsessed, and I know it, but I can’t help it. How can I not think about my weight all the time, when every magazine, every movie, every television show I see screams at me that I have to be thin to be desirable?

Appearance Still Counts This is the first theme. As Jeanne notes in her commentary, women are still judged by their looks. To be desirable is to be pretty, slim, and well dressed. The focus on appearance begins in the early years of life, when girls are given dolls for whom they select fashions, a play activity that teaches girls to focus on appearance. Gift catalogues for children regularly feature makeup kits, adornments for hair, and even wigs, so girls learn early to spend time and effort on looking good. Teen magazines for girls are saturated with ads for makeup, diet aids, and hair products. Romance novels send the message that popularity depends on wearing the right clothes, having the right procedures, and being rich, thin, and sexy (Johnson, 2007, 2011; Wolf, 2006). In stores, women see clothes they are encouraged to buy on mannequins that are size 2, 4, or 0. Given the relentless pressure to be thin and beautiful, it's not surprising that disorders related to body image have become so common that they are considered customary in young women (McRobbie, 2009; Spar, 2013). The makeover genre of television programs features a person, most often a woman, who looks ordinary when viewers first see her and who is then made over to be very attractive. To maintain the new "improved" image, she must become an active consumer, spending her time and money on products and services to make her acceptable.

Consumption is unending and never sufficient to secure lasting success (Johnson, 2007; Levin & Kilbourne, 2008; Spar, 2013). As Susan Barash notes in her insightful book, *Tripping the Prom Queen* (2006), "in the perpetual beauty contest any woman who wins the contest today must expect to lose it—if not tomorrow, then the day after, or the day after that" because "beauty is bound up inextricably with youth" (p. 110).

Women athletes may feel special pressure to look and act feminine. Women athletes in our classes tell us that, if they don't look feminine, others assume they are lesbians simply because they are strong and athletically skilled. Female Olympic competitors increasingly pose nude or nearly nude in *Sports Illustrated*, *FHM* (*For Him Magazine*), or *Playboy*, which resoundingly performs femininity. And let's not forget lingerie football. To be successful both as athletes and as women, women athletes have to violate some facets of the traditional image of women while also conforming to other facets of it (Gilenstam, Karp, & Henriksson-Larsen, 2008; Meán & Kassing, 2008).

Be Sensitive and Caring A majority of women feel they are expected to be nice, deferential, and helpful and to care about and for others. From assuming primary responsibility for young children to taking care of elderly, sick, and disabled relatives, women do the preponderance of hands-on caring.

In addition, many girls learn that being outspoken and smart does not win them prizes in the quest to be seen as feminine. Males who take charge are praised and admired, but females who take charge risk being called the new b-word: bossy (Sandberg & Chávez, 2014). Girls are encouraged to soften their opinions and not to stand up to boys at school because they fear being called "bitch" (Bennett et al., 2010). The bottom line is that, for many girls, adolescence is the start of shifting attention from developing and asserting identity to pleasing others.

MALA

Males are favored over females in Indian culture. It is custom for a girl's family to give a dowry to a man who marries the girl to make it worth his while. As a result, many poor families in India kill a newborn baby if it is female and rejoice if the baby is male. When my third sister was born, my great grandmother expressed her disappointment that we had no boys and so many girls.

Negative Treatment by Others This is a third persistent theme of femininity for women. Men students in our classes sometimes challenge this as a theme of femininity. They say women are treated better than men. They point out that women—but not men—get free drinks at “Ladies’ Night,” they get their meals paid for by dates, and they can cry their way out of speeding tickets. However, these rather minor advantages of being female don’t compensate for more significant disadvantages such as being more subject to sexual assault, more likely to live in poverty, and more likely to face job and salary discrimination.

BONITA

You asked us to think about whether we ever got the message that males are more valued than females. I know I did. I guess I got it in a lot of ways, but one really stands out. I remember, when I was nine, my mother was pregnant for the third time. When she went into labor, Daddy took her to the hospital with me and my sister. We all sat in the waiting room while they took Mom down the hall. Later, the doctor came in and went to my father. I still remember his exact words. He said, “I’m sorry, Mr. Chavis, it’s another girl. Guess you’ll have to try again.”

Devaluation and mistreatment of females is pervasive in Western cultures. The Web teems with sites that feature sexual assaults on women. Popular music refers to women as “bitches” and “hos,” and routinely shows men abusing them. Mainstream video games allow players to earn points by mauling or killing women.

Devaluation of femininity is not only built into cultural views but typically is internalized by individuals, including women. Negative treatment of females begins early and can be especially intense in girls’ peer groups (Wilier, 2011). Girls can be highly critical of other girls who are not pretty, thin, and otherwise feminine, as Rebecca’s comment and the Exploring Gendered Lives feature on page 159 demonstrate.

REBECCA

“Sugar and spice and everything nice” is not the whole picture about girls. They can be really mean, especially to other girls. In middle school, there was one girl who was a real bully. Sherry and I were friends until 7th grade, and

then out of nowhere she started ignoring me and spreading rumors about me to make other people not want to be friends with me. Boys may fight physically with each other, but at least that's direct and honest. When Sherry decided she didn't like me, she was really underhanded and indirect in how she hurt me.

Rebecca is right when she says that sugar and spice is not a full description of girls. Research shows that many young girls engage in social aggression toward other girls (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Simmons, 2011). As the term implies, social aggression involves attacking others using social, rather than physical, strategies. It takes forms such as spreading hurtful rumors, excluding a girl from groups, and encouraging others to turn against a particular girl. Social media provide abundant new ways to express social aggression. For instance, girls can post photos of their parties on Facebook so girls who weren't invited know they weren't (Simmons, 2011).

Why do young girls rely on indirect strategies of aggression? One reason appears to be that, even at young ages, girls understand that they are supposed to be nice to everyone, so they fear that being overtly mean or competitive would lead to disapproval or punishment (Barash, 2006; Simmons, 2004). Instead of learning how to work through feelings of anger, dislike, and so forth, young girls learn to express those feelings only indirectly.

Be Superwoman This is a fourth theme emerging in cultural expectations of women (Sandberg, 2013; Spar, 2013). Sharon's exhilaration (see box on page 160) over the choices open to her is tempered by Emily's impression that women feel they are required to try to have it all. It's not enough to be just a homemaker and mother or just a career woman. Many young women today seem to feel they are expected to do it all.

EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

Sisterhood?

Sororities claim to be sisterhoods—communities in which unrelated women become caring sisters to one another. Carolyn Thatcher might disagree. In 2007, she and 22 other members of DePauw University's chapter of Delta Zeta were dropped from the sorority. Why? Some members of the chapter were upset that fewer students were pledging Delta Zeta, so they decided that the sorority would be more attractive if all members met

what one of the remaining sisters called standards of "social image, appearance, and weight" (Adler, 2007, p. 47). The only black member of the sorority was ousted, as were two of the three Asian members, and all members who wore a size larger than eight. Only 12 of the original 35 members were allowed to stay. However, only half of those—six women—chose to stay. The other six left to show solidarity with their ousted sisters.

TAKE A STAND: Do you think sororities have a right to exclude girls who don't meet a specific physical ideal?

SHARON

My mother and I talk about women, and she tells me that she's glad she didn't have so many options. She says it was easier for her than it is for me because she knew what she was supposed to do—marry and raise a family—and she didn't have to go through the identity crisis that I do. I see her point, yet I kind of like having alternatives. I know I wouldn't be happy investing my total self in a home and family. I just have to be out doing things in the world. But my best friend really wants to do that. She's marrying a guy who wants that, too, so as soon as they've saved enough to be secure, they plan for her to quit work to raise a family. I know someone else who says she just flat out doesn't want to marry. She wants to be a doctor, and she doesn't think she can do that plus take care of a home and family, so she wants to stay single. I don't really know yet if I will or won't have kids, but it's nice to know I can choose to go either way. My mother couldn't.

EMILY

Women are expected to want to climb the business ladder, yet they are also expected to pick up the kids after school, make dinner, help with homework, and be a loving wife. I do not want a career that will ruin my family life or a family life that will ruin my career. How am I supposed to pick between my personal life and my career goals? Why is it that women are expected to sacrifice their careers or be superwomen who do it all but men don't have to be that way?

Women students talk with us frequently about the tension they feel trying to figure out how to have a rich family life and a successful career. They want both careers and families and don't see how they can make it all work. The physical and psychological toll on women who try to do it all is well documented, and it shows no signs of abating (Coonz, 2013; Kantor, 2012; Spar, 2013; Traister, 2012; Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

Careers for Women: Gendered, Raced, and Classed

What do gender, race, and class have to do with expectations about working? In-depth interviews revealed that expectations about who works full-time are shaped by gender, race, and socioeconomic class (Damaske, 2011). Roughly half of women who grew up in working-class white and/

or Latino families expected to work, whereas nearly all working-class black women expected to work in the paid labor market. The clear majority of middle-class white, Asian, African-American, and Latina families expect to work continually.

TAKE A STAND: In what ways do you think your race and ethnicity shape your expectations regarding working outside of the home?

There Is No Single Meaning of Feminine Anymore This is the final theme of femininity in the current era. This theme reflects all the others and the contradictions inherent in them. A woman who is assertive and ambitious in a career is likely to meet with approval, disapproval, anger, and curiosity from some people and to be applauded by others. At the same time, a woman who chooses to stay home while her children are young will be criticized by some women and men, envied by others, and respected by still others. Perhaps, as Sharon suggests in her commentary, there are many ways to be feminine, and we can respect all of them.

Prevailing themes of femininity in Western culture reveal both constancy and change. Traditional expectations of attractiveness and caring for others persist, as does the greater likelihood of negative treatment by others. Yet, today there are options that allow women with different talents, interests, and identities to define themselves in diverse ways and to chart life courses that suit them as individuals.

Growing Up Outside Conventional Genders

Not every person grows up identifying with socially prescribed gender, sex, and sexual orientation. For people who do not identify with and perform the socially prescribed gender, sex, and sexuality, growing up can be particularly difficult. Gay men are often socially ostracized because they are perceived as feminine, and lesbians may be scorned because they are perceived as masculine.

Social isolation also greets many people who are (or are thought to be) transgender (Boylan, 2013a, b). They find themselves trapped in a society that rigidly pairs males with masculinity and females with femininity. There are no in-between spaces, no means of blurring the rigid lines, and no options beyond the binary choices of male/female, masculine/feminine, and straight/gay. Consider this blog post from a 17-year-old (Kellerman, 2012):

I'm CJ, formerly known as Chana. I'm also "genderqueer," which, in my case, means that I feel part-female and part-male. I'm not sure yet whether I will transition or not.... My mother requested to list me on Facebook as her daughter, but I didn't feel that that was totally right, but neither was "son." But there was no other choice. I either have to be a brother or a sister to my sisters on Facebook. And that's not me. It's troubling that I can't be Facebook friends with my family and correctly identify my relationships with them, because according to Facebook those relationships don't exist. Or maybe I don't exist. How strange is that?

For people who do not fit neatly into conventional sex and gender categories, it's hard to find role models and equally difficult to find acceptance from family, peers, and society. Trans people also may be frustrated by others who hold wildly inaccurate assumptions about their identities. Of the students who have studied gender and communication with us over the years, a few have volunteered commentaries on growing up outside of conventional gender roles. Ben, Zena, and Mike's commentaries appear on this page and the next.

BEN

What it means to be a man depends totally on whether you're gay or straight. I'm gay—knew that since I was 9 or 10. And being gay is hell for a teenager.

Other guys, the straight ones, called me names all through middle school and high school—fag, queer, girlie. It didn't matter that I was big and toned and good at baseball. They totally excluded me because I was gay.

Until very recently, transgender and intersex people seldom made their identities or struggles public. That's changing as more and more people who don't fit in conventional identity boxes demand to be recognized and accepted on their own terms. One sign of changing attitudes toward transgender people is campus policies. Many colleges have added gender identity and expression to their nondiscrimination policies and passed gender-neutral housing policies so that transgender students can choose appropriate roommates (Tilsley, 2010). Yet many elementary, middle, and high schools do not have such policies so trans students encounter daily challenges that do not encumber their straight classmates.

ZENA

I wear a tie always and a dress never. If I go to a doctor, I'm labeled "female," but in everyday life, most people think I'm a "male." The problem is, neither of those labels is right. Neither fits me. I'm both or neither or maybe something that is totally different than those stupid categories. Sexually, I'm attracted to both "males" and "females," although more often to "females." I have no interest in girlie things, but I'm sensitive to others and a very caring person. All I can say is that I'm Zena, and that's a name I gave myself.

Individuals who don't fit into conventional categories for sex, gender, and sexual orientation face challenges that most gender-conforming people can't imagine. For those of you who fit comfortably in the existing gender system, imagine this: You visit a doctor and learn that you are actually a different sex than you have believed yourself to be and than you identify with. If you think of yourself as a woman, you discover that genetically you are a man. If you think of yourself as a man, you learn that genetically you are a woman. Your body doesn't match your self-concept. Everything from how you dress to whom you date to which bathroom you can use suddenly becomes an issue that you have to negotiate.

MIKE

I have no idea what it means to be a man. I've never felt I was one, never identified with men. As a kid, I liked to dress in my mother's clothes until my dad caught me and beat the—out of me! I still identify more with women, and I think that I was meant to be a woman. Growing up looking like a male but feeling like a female meant that I didn't belong anywhere, didn't fit with anyone. It's better now that I'm in college and have found some people like me, but there was nobody in my rural Southern hometown!

Stay with this hypothetical situation. Would you want to have hormone treatments and surgery so that your body was more consistent with the sex and gender you feel that you are? The surgery is expensive and painful. Hormonal treatments can have side effects. Are you willing to tolerate all of that? Or would you choose, instead, to change how you dress, style your hair, move, speak, and so forth in order to perform more credibly as your genetic sex? Or would you continue living as you have, looking and acting as the sex and gender you identify with while knowing that by medical criteria you are actually a different sex and perhaps a different gender?

SUMMARY

We are born into a gendered society that shapes our personal gendered identities. Young children get first ideas about identity as they interact with parents and siblings who often see them and treat them as gendered. Additional messages about gender come as children watch boy characters on television engaging in more adventurous, rugged play than girl characters. They see cereal boxes that feature girls with dolls and boys with guns. They play with peers who, because of their own socialization, exert pressure to conform to gender norms.

But socialization is not as deterministic as it may seem. Clearly, we are influenced by the expectations of our culture, family, and peers. Yet these expectations endure only to the extent that individuals and institutions sustain them. Through our own communication and the ways we act, we reinforce or challenge existing views of gender. As we do so, we contribute to forming social views that affect the extent to which each of us can define ourselves and live our lives on our own terms.

KEY TERMS

The following terms are defined in this chapter on the pages indicated, as well as in alphabetical order in the book's glossary, which begins on page 281. The text's companion website also provides interactive flash cards to help you learn these terms and the concepts they represent. You can access the site at www.cengagebrain.com.

ego boundaries 147

gender identity 144

GENDER ONLINE

1. Visit Jazz Jennings's Purple Rainbow Foundation at: <http://www.transkidspurple.com>. Statistics about diverse family forms are available from the Census Bureau at: <http://www.census.gov/>
2. Online search terms: "father role," "feminine socialization," "masculine socialization," "trans identity."

REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND ACTION

1. How did your parents and/or stepparents model masculinity and femininity? Does your own embodiment of gender reflect their influences?
2. Analyze how your ego boundaries work in one particular relationship in your life. How do your ego boundaries both enhance and constrain that relationship?
3. We opened this chapter by asking you to write what it means to you to be a man or a woman today in the United States. How does your response echo or differ from themes in the responses of student commentaries presented in this chapter? How does your response differ from or contradict themes in the commentaries presented in this chapter?

**RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

1. *Tough Guise, 2* (Katz, 2013). Media Education Foundation, 26 Center Street, Northampton, MA. This film offers a critical perspective on socialization that links traditional masculinity with aggression and violence. It is a disturbing video and an important one.
2. Michael Messner is a scholar who studies gender, particularly as it relates to athletics. Visit his blog at *Huffington Post*: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>