

Master status one status within a set that stands out or overrides all others.

junkie is an *achieved status*. Sometimes, one status within our status set stands out or overrides all the others. This is called a **master status**. Examples might include being unemployed, being lesbian, being disabled, or any status that overshadows other statuses. Master status roles can be ascribed, like disability, or achieved, like being a celebrity. The key characteristic of a master status is that people tend to interact with you on the basis of that one status alone.

Gender Roles

Gender roles sets of behavioral norms assumed to accompany one's status as male or female.

One of the most popular strains of thought to evolve from role theory has been the concept of **gender roles**, sets of behavioral norms assumed to accompany one's status as male or female. In their critiques of role theory, gender theorists such as Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) have argued that the statuses of boy/girl and man/woman have distinct power and significance which role theory doesn't adequately capture (you can read more about this in Chapter 8 on sex and gender). If we were to put West and Zimmerman's ideas into the language of role theory, we could argue that sex constitutes a master status in our society. We can see how this fits into larger theories of socialization. From the moment they leave the womb, babies usually wear either pink or blue to designate their sex. There are signs, balloons, greeting cards, and e-cards announcing, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" Little boys' clothes are often decorated with baseballs, cars, or tools, whereas girls' clothes tend to feature flowers, bows, and lace. Similarly, studies (Lewis et al., 1992) have shown that people interact with babies differently based on whether they are boys or girls, commenting on how "big" and "strong" baby boys are and how "pretty" baby girls may be, or by closely snuggling with female babies rather than holding them outwardly, as with male babies so that they might see the world.

Not just family members but the larger social world interact with boys and girls very differently and, consequently, socialize them into different roles. Take a stroll through your local toy store, and you will glimpse the function of toys and play—both very important to the development of children—in creating and maintaining gender roles. The toys for playing house will likely be displayed in boxes showing images of little girls pushing and pulling pink irons and purple vacuum cleaners. The boxes for toy stoves will depict girls cooking. Baby dolls will be wrapped in pastel colors, and their packaging will show little girls cradling them. Now meander through the section of the store displaying tool sets, workbenches,



How do the displays at this New York City toy store serve as an example of the ways that we learn gender roles through socialization?