

governments set policies or rules that affect males and females differently (Risman 2004). To the extent that men have more power than women in politics, the economy, and the family, the gender system is called **patriarchy**.

One interesting group of people challenges many of our assumptions about sex and gender and how they go together. **Transgendered** individuals are those who were assigned one sex category at birth, based on the usual anatomical criteria, but feel strongly they belong in the other sex category. Some undergo surgery to correct this perceived incorrect assignment. Transgendered people are often subjected to extreme ridicule and even violence because of the actions of people who are intolerant of those who challenge the notion that one's sex is something fundamental and unchanging. Sometimes the term *transgender* is used to refer to a broader group of people who change or challenge sex or gender categories—perhaps dressing conventionally male while being in a female body (or vice versa) or rejecting the need to look male or female in dress and style altogether (McKenna and Kessler 2006). This challenges people's belief that sex and gender are binaries—having only two categories.

Gender Socialization

12.1.2: Describe the process of gender socialization.

One way that gender is socially constructed is through *socialization*, a concept we have explored in more detail in Chapter 5. Socialization is the means by which members of a society are taught its norms and practices. Some of what gets taught is conventions about gender—what boys should do differently than girls or women differently than men.

Parents are important agents of socialization. Most parents dress boys and girls differently, decorate their rooms differently, have different aspirations for them, and give them different toys. Parents' socialization practices have changed in that girls are now encouraged to take part in a broader range of activities. For example, many parents now encourage their girls to play sports and give them what used to be thought of as boys' toys, such as Legos and racing cars. But not many parents have started to give their boys dolls. Studies show that fathers—more than mothers—are particularly discouraging of boys doing anything that they see as feminine, like playing with dolls or ballet dancing (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974). Peer groups are also agents of socialization. Male peer groups often ostracize boys who are not seen as stereotypically masculine enough and ridicule boys believed to be gay (whether they are or not) (Pascoe 2007).

Another important agent of socialization is the mass media—popular music, movies, television shows, Internet sites, and advertisements. Most of us see and hear hundreds of media messages every day. In movies and television, women portrayed in romantic roles are almost always young and thin and look like models. In contrast, men can be cast in a romantic role even if they are older and heavy. Ads typically



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show women rather than men doing housework. Men are seen in powerful roles in the economy, politics, and athletics. Some of this simply reflects the current social reality, but men and women are portrayed in a narrower range of roles in the media than they take in real life (Holtzman 2000).

Socialization does not only affect children but continues through adulthood as those around us continue to affect us, we continue to see and hear media images, and we are affected by major institutions such as religion and government.

Gender Differences Vary by Setting and Time

12.1.3: Explain how gender differences vary by setting and time.

There are two main reasons why we know that many of the typical differences we observe between men and women are, at least in part, socially constructed. First, these gender differences vary between different social settings—that is, between different cultures and even between different situations within one society. Second, gender arrangements have changed over time. For example, the proportion of married women with young children who hold paid jobs has increased dramatically. If biology were driving all the differences between men and women, we would not expect things to vary by the social setting or change over time.

One example of gender changing between different social settings is that men and women conform more closely to norms of masculinity or femininity when they are aware of being watched. Look at the data from one revealing study: One research team discovered this in a study in which they asked college students to play a video game in which they first defended and then attacked by dropping bombs. The number of bombs a student dropped in the video game was taken as a measure of aggressive behavior. The researchers were interested in whether there were gender differences in aggression because most people think of men as more