Language and Gender

PENELOPE ECKERT
SALLY McCONNELL-GINET

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Swift 10/14 pt *System* LaTeX 2$_\varepsilon$ [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

ISBN 0 521 65283 9 hardback
ISBN 0 521 65426 2 paperback

Contents

Illustrations

CHAPTER 1

Constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing gender

We are surrounded by gender lore from the time we are very small. It is ever-present in conversation, humor, and conflict, and it is called upon to explain everything from driving styles to food preferences. Gender is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural. The world swarms with ideas about gender – and these ideas are so commonplace that we take it for granted that they are true, accepting common adage as scientific fact. As scholars and researchers, though, it is our job to look beyond what appears to be common sense to find not simply what truth might be behind it, but how it came to be common sense. It is precisely because gender seems natural, and beliefs about gender seem to be obvious truth, that we need to step back and examine gender from a new perspective. Doing this requires that we suspend what we are used to and what feels comfortable, and question some of our most fundamental beliefs. This is not easy, for gender is so central to our understanding of ourselves and of the world that it is difficult to pull back and examine it from new perspectives.[1] But it is precisely the fact that gender seems self-evident which makes the study of gender interesting. It brings the challenge to uncover the process of construction that creates what we have so long thought of as natural and inexorable – to study gender not as given, but as an accomplishment; not simply as cause, but as effect. The results of failure to recognize this challenge are manifest not only in the popular media, but in academic work on language and gender as well. As a result, some gender scholarship does as much to reify and support existing beliefs as to promote more reflective and informed thinking about gender.

1 It is easier, though, for people who feel that they are disadvantaged in the social order, and it is no doubt partially for this reason that many recent theories of gender have been developed primarily (though not exclusively) by women. (In some times and places, women have not had the opportunity to develop "theories" of anything.)

Sex and gender

Gender is not something we are born with, and not something we *have*, but something we *do* (West and Zimmerman 1987) – something we *perform* (Butler 1990). Imagine a small boy proudly following his father. As he swaggers and sticks out his chest, he is doing everything he can to be like his father – to be a *man*. Chances are his father is not swaggering, but the boy is creating a persona that embodies what he is admiring in his adult male role model. The same is true of a small girl as she puts on her mother's high-heeled shoes, smears makeup on her face and minces around the room. Chances are that when these children are grown they will not swagger and mince respectively, but their childhood performances contain elements that will no doubt surface in their adult male and female behaviors. Chances are, also, that the girl will adopt that swagger on occasion as well, but adults are not likely to consider it as "cute" as her mincing act. And chances are that if the boy decides to try a little mincing, he won't be considered cute at all. In other words, gendered performances are available to everyone, but with them come constraints on who can perform which personae with impunity. And this is where gender and sex come together, as society tries to match up ways of behaving with biological sex assignments.

Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex. Gender builds on biological sex, it exaggerates biological difference and, indeed, it carries biological difference into domains in which it is completely irrelevant. There is no biological reason, for example, why women should mince and men should swagger, or why women should have red toenails and men should not. But while we think of sex as biological and gender as social, this distinction is not clear-cut. People tend to think of gender as the result of nurture – as social and hence fluid – while sex is simply given by biology. However, there is no obvious point at which sex leaves off and gender begins, partly because there is no single objective biological criterion for male or female sex. Sex is based in a combination of anatomical, endocrinal and chromosomal features, and the selection among these criteria for sex assignment is based very much on cultural beliefs about what actually makes someone male or female. Thus the very definition of the biological categories *male* and *female*, and people's understanding of themselves and others as male or female, is ultimately social. Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) sums up the situation as follows:

> labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs

> about gender – not science – can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place. (p. 3)

Biology offers us up dichotomous male and female prototypes, but it also offers us many individuals who do not fit those prototypes in a variety of ways. Blackless *et al*. (2000) estimate that 1 in 100 babies are born with bodies that differ from standard male or female. These bodies may have such conditions as unusual chromosomal makeup (1 in 1,000 male babies are born with two X chromosomes), hormonal differences such as insensitivity to androgens (1 in 13,000 births), or a range of configurations and combinations of genitals and reproductive organs. The attribution of intersex does not end at birth – 1 in 66 girls experience growth of the clitoris in childhood or adolescence (known as late onset adrenal hyperplasia).

When "anomalous" babies are born, surgical and/or endocrinal manipulations may be used to bring their recalcitrant bodies into closer conformity with either the male or the female category. Common medical practice imposes stringent requirements for male and female genitals at birth – a penis that is less than 2.5 centimeters long when stretched, or a clitoris[2] that is more than one centimeter long are both commonly subject to surgery in which both are reduced to an "acceptable" sized clitoris (Dreger 1998). As a number of critics have observed (e.g. Dreger 1998), the standards of acceptability are far more stringent for male genitals than female, and thus the most common surgery transforms "unacceptable" penises into clitorises, regardless of the child's other sexual characteristics, and even if this requires fashioning a nonfunctional vagina out of tissue from the colon. In recent years, the activist organization, the Intersex Society of North America,[3] has had considerable success as an advocacy group for the medical rights of intersex people.

In those societies that have a greater occurrence of certain kinds of hermaphroditic or intersexed infants than elsewhere,[4] there

2 Alice Dreger (1998) more accurately describes these as a phallus on a baby classified as male or a phallus on a baby classified as female.

3 The website of the Intersex Society of North America (http://www.isna.org) offers a wealth of information on intersex. [The publisher has used its best endeavors to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.]

4 For instance, congenital adrenal hyperplasia (which combines two X chromosomes with masculinized external genitalia and the internal reproductive organs of a potentially fertile woman) occurs in 43 children per million in New Zealand, but 3,500 per million among the Yupik of Southwestern Alaska (www.isna.org).

sometimes are social categories beyond the standard two into which such babies can be placed. But even in such societies, categories that go beyond the basic two are often seen as anomalous.[5]

It is commonly argued that biological differences between males and females determine gender by causing enduring differences in capabilities and dispositions. Higher levels of testosterone, for example, are said to lead men to be more aggressive than women; and left-brain dominance is said to lead men to be more "rational" while their relative lack of brain lateralization should lead women to be more "emotional." But the relation between physiology and behavior is not simple, and it is all too easy to leap for gender dichotomies. It has been shown that hormonal levels, brain activity patterns, and even brain anatomy can be a result of different activity as well as a cause. For example research with species as different as rhesus monkeys (Rose *et al*. 1972) and fish (Fox *et al*. 1997) has documented changes in hormone levels as a result of changes in social position. Work on sex differences in the brain is very much in its early stages, and as Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) points out in considerable detail, it is far from conclusive. What is supposed to be the most robust finding – that women's corpus callosum, the link between the two brain hemispheres, is relatively larger than men's – is still anything but robust. Men's smaller corpus callosum is supposed to result in greater lateralization, while women's larger one is supposed to yield greater integration between the two hemispheres, at least in visuo-spatial functions. But given that evidence for sex-linked brain differences in humans is based on very small samples, often from sick or injured populations, generalizations about sex differences are shaky at best. In addition, not that much is known about the connections between brain physiology and cognition – hence about the consequences of any physiological differences scientists may be seeking or finding. Nonetheless, any results that might support physiological differences are readily snatched up and combined with any variety of gender stereotypes in some often quite fantastic leaps of logic. And the products of these leaps can in turn feed directly into social, and particularly into

5 There are cultures where what we might think of as more than two adult gender categories are named and otherwise institutionally recognized as well: the berdache of the Plains Indians, the hijras in India. Although details vary significantly, the members of such supernumerary categories are outside the "normal" order of things, and tend to be somewhat feared or devalued or otherwise socially disadvantaged. Nonetheless, there is apparently considerably more tolerance for nonstandard gender categories in some societies than in the western industrial societies most likely to be familiar to readers of this book. An early discussion of social groups with more than two sex and/or gender categories is provided by Martin and Voorhies (1975), ch. 4, "Supernumerary sexes." More recent contributions on this topic from both historical and cross-cultural perspectives appear in Herdt (1996).

educational, policy, with arguments that gender equity in such "left-brain areas" as mathematics and engineering is impossible.

The eagerness of some scientists to establish a biological basis for gender difference, and the public's eagerness to take these findings up, points to the fact that we put a good deal of work into emphasizing, producing, and enforcing the dichotomous categories of male and female. In the process, differences or similarities that blur the edges of these categories, or that might even constitute other potential categories, are backgrounded, or *erased*.

The issue here is not whether there are sex-linked biological differences that might affect such things as predominant cognitive styles. What is at issue is the place of such research in social and scientific practice. Sex difference is being placed at the center of activity, as both question and answer, as often flimsy evidence of biological difference is paired up with unanalyzed behavioral stereotypes. And the results are broadcast through the most august media as if their scientific status were comparable to the mapping of the human genome. The mere fact of this shows clearly that everyone, from scientists to journalists to the reading public, has an insatiable appetite for sensationalist gender news. Indeed, gender is at the center of our social world. And any evidence that our social world maps onto the biological world is welcome evidence to those who would like an explanation and justification for the way things are.

To whatever extent gender may be related to biology, it does not flow naturally and directly from our bodies. The individual's chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics do not determine occupation, gait, or use of color terminology. And while male pattern baldness may restrict some adult men's choice of hairdo, there are many men who could sport a pageboy or a beehive as easily as many women, and nothing biological keeps women from shaving their heads. Gender is the very process of creating a dichotomy by effacing similarity and elaborating on difference, and even where there are biological differences, these differences are exaggerated and extended in the service of constructing gender. Actual differences are always paired with enormous similarities, never dichotomizing people but putting them on a scale with many women and men occupying the same positions.

Consider our voices. On average, men's vocal tracts are longer than women's, yielding a lower voice pitch. But individuals' actual conversational voice pitch across society does not simply conform to the size of the vocal tract. At the age of four to five years, well before puberty differentiates male and female vocal tracts, boys and girls learn to differentiate their voices as boys consciously and unconsciously lower

their voices while girls raise theirs. In the end, one can usually tell whether even a very small child is male or female on the basis of their voice pitch and quality alone, regardless of the length of their vocal tract.

Relative physical stature is another biological difference that is elaborated and exaggerated in the production of gender. Approximately half of the women and half of the men in the USA (Kuczmarski *et al.* 2000) are between 64 and 70 inches tall. With this considerable overlap, one might expect in any randomly chosen male and female pair that the woman would run a good chance of being taller than the man. In actuality, among heterosexual couples, one only occasionally sees such a combination, because height is a significant factor in people's choice of a heterosexual mate. While there is no biological reason for women to be shorter than their male mates, an enormous majority of couples exhibit this height relation – far more than would occur through a process of selection in which height was random (Goffman 1976). Not only do people mate so as to keep him taller than her, they also see him as taller than her even when this is not the case. For example, Biernat, Manis, and Nelson 1991 (cited in Valian 1998) presented college students with photos of people and asked them to guess the people's height. Each photo had a reference item like a doorway or a desk, making it possible to compare the heights of people across photos. Although photos of a male of a given height were matched by photos of a female of the same height (and vice versa), the judges saw the males as taller than they actually were and the females as shorter than they actually were.

This book will focus on gender as a social construction – as the means by which society jointly accomplishes the differentiation that constitutes the gender order. While we recognize that biology imposes certain physiological constraints on the average male and female, we treat the elaboration and magnification of these differences as entirely social. Readers will come to this book with their own set of beliefs about the origins and significance of gender. They may have certain understandings of the implications for gender of biological and medical science. They may subscribe to a particular set of religious beliefs about gender. The notion of the social elaboration of sex is not incompatible with belief in a biological or divine imperative – the difference will be in where one leaves off and the other begins. All we ask of our readers is that they open-mindedly consider the evidence and arguments we advance. Our own thinking about gender has developed and changed over many years of thinking about these issues, and it will undoubtedly continue to change as we continue to explore gender issues in our

research and in our lives. We have written this account of gender from a broadly feminist perspective. As we understand that perspective, the basic capabilities, rights, and responsibilities of women and men are far less different than is commonly thought. At the same time, that perspective also suggests that the social treatment of women and men, and thus their experiences and their own and others' expectations for them, is far more different than is usually assumed. In this book we offer evidence that these differences in what happens to women and to men derive in considerable measure from people's beliefs about sexual difference, their interpretations of its significance, and their reliance on those beliefs and interpretations to justify the unequal treatment of women and men.

Learning to be gendered

Dichotomous beginnings: It's a boy! It's a girl!

In the famous words of Simone de Beauvoir, "Women are not born, they are made." The same is true of men. The making of a man or a woman is a never-ending process that begins before birth – from the moment someone begins to wonder if the pending child will be a boy or a girl. And the ritual announcement at birth that it is in fact one or the other instantly transforms an "it" into a "he" or a "she" (Butler 1993), standardly assigning it to a lifetime as a male or as a female.[6] This attribution is further made public and lasting through the linguistic event of naming. To name a baby *Mary* is to do something that makes it easy for a wide range of English speakers to maintain the initial "girl" attribution. In English-speaking societies, not all names are sex-exclusive (e.g. *Chris*, *Kim*, *Pat*), and sometimes names change their gender classification. For example, *Evelyn* was available as a male name in Britain long after it had become an exclusively female name in America, and *Whitney*, once exclusively a surname or a male first name in America, is now bestowed on baby girls. In some times and places, the state or religious institutions disallow sex-ambiguous given names. Finland, for example, has lists of legitimate female and legitimate male names that must be consulted before the baby's name becomes official. Thus the dichotomy of male and female is the ground upon which we build selves from the moment of birth. These early linguistic acts set

6 Nowadays, with the possibility of having this information before birth, wanting to know in advance or not wanting to know can become ideologically charged. Either way, the sex of the child is frequently as great a preoccupation as its health.

up a baby for life, launching a gradual process of learning to be a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, and to see all others as boys or girls, men or women as well. There are currently no other legitimate ways to think about ourselves and others – and we will be expected to pattern all kinds of things about ourselves as a function of that initial dichotomy. In the beginning, adults will do the child's gender work, treating it as a boy or as a girl, and interpreting its every move as that of a boy or of a girl. Then over the years, the child will learn to take over its part of the process, doing its own gender work and learning to support the gender work of others. The first thing people want to know about a baby is its sex, and convention provides a myriad of props to reduce the necessity of asking – and it becomes more and more important, as the child develops, not to have to ask. At birth, many hospital nurseries provide pink caps for girls and blue caps for boys, or in other ways provide some visual sign of the sex that has been attributed to the baby. While this may seem quite natural to members of the society, in fact this color coding points out no difference that has any bearing on the medical treatment of the infants. Go into a store in the US to buy a present for a newborn baby, and you will immediately be asked "boy or girl?" If the reply is "I don't know" or, worse, "I don't care," sales personnel are often perplexed. Overalls for a girl may be OK (though they are "best" if pink or flowered or in some other way marked as "feminine"), but gender liberalism goes only so far. You are unlikely to buy overalls with vehicles printed on them for a girl, and even more reluctant to buy a frilly dress with puffed sleeves or pink flowered overalls for a boy. And if you're buying clothing for a baby whose sex you do not know, sales people are likely to counsel you to stick with something that's plain yellow or green or white. Colors are so integral to our way of thinking about gender that gender attributions have bled into our view of the colors, so that people tend to believe that pink is a more "delicate" color than blue. This is a prime example of the naturalization of what is in fact an arbitrary sign. In America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) reports, blue was favored for girls and bright pink for boys.

If gender flowed naturally from sex, one might expect the world to sit back and simply allow the baby to become male or female. But in fact, sex determination sets the stage for a lifelong process of gendering, as the child becomes, and learns how to be, male or female. Names and clothing are just a small part of the symbolic resources used to support a consistent ongoing gender attribution even when children are clothed. That we can speak of a child growing up *as a girl* or *as a boy* suggests that initial sex attribution is far more than just a simple

observation of a physical characteristic. *Being a girl* or *being a boy* is not a stable state but an ongoing accomplishment, something that is actively *done* both by the individual so categorized and by those who interact with it in the various communities to which it belongs. The newborn initially depends on others to *do* its gender, and they come through in many different ways, not just as individuals but as part of socially structured communities that link individuals to social institutions and cultural ideologies. It is perhaps at this early life stage that it is clearest that gender is a collaborative affair – that one must learn to perform as a male or a female, and that these performances require support from one's surroundings.

Indeed, we do not know how to interact with another human being (or often members of other species), or how to judge them and talk about them, unless we can attribute a gender to them. Gender is so deeply engrained in our social practice, in our understanding of ourselves and of others, that we almost cannot put one foot in front of the other without taking gender into consideration. Although most of us rarely notice this overtly in everyday life, most of our interactions are colored by our performance of our own gender, and by our attribution of gender to others.

From infancy, male and female children are interpreted differently, and interacted with differently. Experimental evidence suggests that adults' perceptions of babies are affected by their beliefs about the babies' sex. Condry and Condry (1976) found that adults watching a film of a crying infant were more likely to hear the cry as angry if they believed the infant was a boy, and as plaintive or fearful if they believed the infant was a girl. In a similar experiment, adults judged a 24-hour-old baby as bigger if they believed it to be a boy, and finer-featured if they believed it to be a girl (Rubin, Provenzano and Luria 1974). Such judgments then enter into the way people interact with infants and small children. People handle infants more gently when they believe them to be female, more playfully when they believe them to be male.

And they talk to them differently. Parents use more diminutives (*kitty*, *doggie*) when speaking to girls than to boys (Gleason *et al*. 1994), they use more inner state words (*happy*, *sad*) when speaking to girls (Ely *et al*. 1995). They use more direct prohibitives (*don't do that!*) and more emphatic prohibitives (*no! no! no!*) to boys than to girls (Bellinger and Gleason 1982). Perhaps, one might suggest, the boys need more prohibitions because they tend to misbehave more than the girls. But Bellinger and Gleason found this pattern to be independent of the actual nature of the children's activity, suggesting that the adults and

their beliefs about sex difference are far more important here than the children's behavior.

With differential treatment, boys and girls eventually learn to *be* different. Apparently, male and female infants cry the same amount (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974), but as they mature, boys cry less and less. There is some evidence that this difference emerges primarily from differential adult response to the crying. Qualitative differences in behavior come about in the same way. A study of thirteen-month-old children in day care (Fagot *et al*. 1985) showed that teachers responded to girls when they talked, babbled, or gestured, while they responded to boys when they whined, screamed, or demanded physical attention. Nine to eleven months later, the same girls talked more than the boys, and the boys whined, screamed, and demanded attention more than the girls. Children's eventual behavior, which seems to look at least statistically different across the sexes, is the product of adults' differential responses to ways of acting that are in many (possibly most) cases very similar indeed. The kids do indeed learn to "do" gender for themselves, to produce sex-differentiated behavior – although even with considerable differential treatment they do not end up with dichotomizing behavioral patterns.

Voice, which we have already mentioned, provides a dramatic example of children's coming to perform gender. At the ages of four to five years, in spite of their identical vocal apparatus, girls and boys begin to differentiate the fundamental frequency of their speaking voice. Boys tend to round and extend their lips, lengthening the vocal tract, whereas girls are tending to spread their lips (with smiles, for example), shortening the vocal tract. Girls are raising their pitches, boys lowering theirs. It may well be that adults are more likely to speak to girls in a high-pitched voice. It may be that they reward boys and girls for differential voice productions. It may also be that children simply observe this difference in older people, or that their differential participation in games (for example play-acting) calls for different voice productions. Elaine Andersen (1990, pp. 24–25), for example, shows that children use high pitch when using baby talk or "teacher register" in role play. Some children speak as the other sex is expected to and thus, as with other aspects of doing gender, there is not a perfect dichotomization in voice pitch (even among adults, some voices are not consistently classified). Nonetheless, there is a striking production of mostly different pitched voices from essentially similar vocal equipment.

There is considerable debate among scholars about the extent to which adults actually do treat boys and girls differently, and many note that the similarities far outweigh the differences. Research on

early gender development – in fact the research in general on gender differences – is almost exclusively done by psychologists. As a result, the research it reports on largely involves observations of behavior in limited settings – whether in a laboratory or in the home or the preschool. Since these studies focus on limited settings and types of interaction and do not follow children through a normal day, they quite possibly miss the cumulative effects of small differences across many different situations. Small differences here and there are probably enough for children to learn what it means in their community to be male or female.

The significance of the small difference can be appreciated from another perspective. The psychological literature tends to treat children as objects rather than subjects. Those studying children have tended to treat others – parents, other adults, peers – as the primary socializing agents. Only relatively recently have investigators begun to explore children's own active strategies for figuring out the social world. Eleanor Maccoby (2002) emphasizes that children have a very clear knowledge of their gender (that is, of whether they are classified as male or female) by the time they are three years old. Given this knowledge, it is not at all clear how much differential treatment children need to learn how to do their designated gender. What they mainly need is the message that male and female are supposed to be different, and that message is everywhere around them.

It has become increasingly clear that children play a very active role in their own development. From the moment they see themselves as social beings, they begin to focus on the enterprise of "growing up." And to some extent, they probably experience many of the gendered developmental dynamics we discuss here not so much as gender-appropriate, but as *grown-up*. The greatest taboo is being "a baby," but the developmental imperative is gendered. Being grown-up, leaving babyhood, means very different things for boys than it does for girls. And the fact that growing up involves gender differentiation is encoded in the words of assessment with which progress is monitored – kids do not behave as good or bad people, but as *good boys* or *good girls*, and they develop into *big boys* and *big girls*.[7] In other words, they do not have the option of growing into just people, but into boys or girls. This does not mean that they see what they're doing in strictly gendered terms. It is probable that when boys and girls alter the fundamental frequency of their voices they are not trying to sound like *girls* or like *boys*, but that

7 Thorne (1993) and others have observed teachers urging children to act like "big boys and girls." Very rarely is a child told "don't act like a baby – you're a big kid now."

they are aspiring for some quality that is itself gendered – cuteness, authority. And the child's aspiration is not simply a matter of reasoning, but a matter of desire – a projection of the self into desired forms of participation in the social world. Desire is a tremendous force in projecting oneself into the future – in the continual remaking of the self that constitutes growing up.

Until about the age of two, boys and girls exhibit the same play behaviors. After that age, play in boys' and girls' groups begins to diverge as they come to select different toys and engage in different activities, and children begin to monitor each other's play, imposing sanctions on gender-inappropriate play. Much is made of the fact that boys become more agonistic than girls, and many attribute this to hormonal and even evolutionary differences (see Maccoby 2000 for a brief review of these various perspectives). But whatever the workings of biology may be, it is clear that this divergence is supported and exaggerated by the social system. As children get older, their play habits are monitored and differentiated, first by adults, and eventually by peers. Parents of small children have been shown to reward their children's choice of gender-appropriate toys (trucks for boys, dolls for girls) (Langlois and Downs 1980). And while parents' support of their children's gendered behavior is not always and certainly not simply a conscious effort at gender socialization, their behavior is probably more powerful than they think. Even parents who strive for gender equality, and who believe that they do not constrain their children's behavior along gender lines, have been observed in experimental situations to do just that.

Learning asymmetry

While it takes a community to develop gender, not all participants in the community are equally involved in enforcing difference. In research on early gender socialization, males – both children and adults – have emerged as more engaged in enforcing gender difference than females. In the research by Rubin *et al.* cited above, for example, fathers were more extreme than mothers in their gender-based misassessments of infants' size and texture. Men are more likely than women to play rough with boys and gently with girls, fathers use differential language patterns to boys and girls more than mothers, and men are more likely than women to reward children for choosing gender-appropriate toys. There are now books aimed at men who want to become more involved parents than their own fathers were. But the message is still often that parenting a girl is quite a different enterprise from parenting a boy. On a self-help shelf encountered at a tourist shop, *How to Be Your Daughter's*

Daddy: 365 Ways to Show Her You Care by Dan Bolin (1993) stood right next to *How to Be Your Little Man's Dad: 365 Things to Do with Your Son* by Dan Bolin and Ken Sutterfield (1993).

It is not only that male adults seem to enforce gender more than female. This enforcement is more intensely aimed at boys than at girls. Adults are more likely to reward boys for choice of gender-appropriate toys than girls – and fathers are more likely to do so for their own sons than for other boys. Boys, in turn, are more rigid in their toy preferences than girls, and they are harder on other boys than on girls for gender-inappropriate play styles. A study of three to five year olds (Langlois and Downs 1980) showed that while girls tended to be neutral about other girls' choices, boys responded positively only to boys with male play styles, and were especially likely to punish their male peers for feminine choices. The outcome is that while activities and behaviors labeled as *male* are treated as appropriate for females as well as for males, those labeled as *female* are treated as appropriate only for females. One way of looking at this is that female activities and behaviors emerge as *marked* – as reserved for a special subset of the population – while male activities and behaviors emerge as *unmarked* or *normal*. This in turn contributes to the androcentric (male-centered) view of gender, which we will discuss in the following section of this chapter.

This asymmetry is partially a function of the cultural devaluation of women and of the feminine. One way or another, most boys and girls learn that most boy things and boy activities are more highly valued than girl things and girl activities, and boys are strongly discouraged from having interests or activities that are associated with girls. Even where they do not encounter such views formulated explicitly or even find them denied explicitly, most boys and girls learn that it is primarily men and not women who do "important" things as adults, have opinions that count, direct the course of events in the public world. It is hardly surprising then that pressures towards gender conformity are not symmetrical.

This asymmetry extends to many domains. While females may wear clothing initially viewed as male, the reverse is highly stigmatized: western women and girls now wear jeans but their male peers are not appearing in skirts. Even names seem to go from male to female and not vice versa. There are girls named Christopher, but no boys named Christine. A girl may be sanctioned for behaving "like a boy" – particularly if she behaves aggressively, and gets into fights – on the grounds that she is being "unladylike" or "not nice." But there is a categorization of "tomboy" reserved for girls who adopt a male rough and tumble

style of play, who display fearlessness and refuse to play with dolls. And while in some circles this categorization may be considered negative, in general in western society it earns some respect and admiration. Boys who adopt girls' behaviors, on the other hand, are severely sanctioned. The term "sissy" is reserved for boys who do not adhere strictly to norms of masculinity (in fact, a sissy is a boy who does not display those very characteristics that make a girl a tomboy).

A child who's told she has to do more housework than her brother because she's a girl, or that she can't be an astronaut when she grows up because she's a girl,[8] is likely to say "that's not fair!" A boy who is told he cannot play with dolls because he's a boy, or that he cannot be a secretary when he grows up, may find that unfair as well. But the boy who is told he can't be a nurse is being told that he is too good to be a nurse. The girl, on the other hand, is essentially being told that she is not good enough to be a doctor. This is not to say that the consequences cannot be tragic for the boy who really wants to play with dolls or grow up to be a nurse. He will be deprived of a legitimate sense of unfairness within society's wider discourses of justice, hence isolated with his sense of unfairness. But gender specialization does carry the evaluation that men's enterprises are generally better than women's, and children learn this quite early on.[9]

Now there are some counterexamples to these general trends, many of them prompted by the feminist and gay rights movements. Some men are taking over domestic tasks like diaper-changing and everyday cookery that were once women's province. Others wear jewels in their ears or gold chains around their necks, adornments reserved for women when we were teenagers. But the dominant pattern that restricts men in moving into what are seen as women's realms and thereby devalued is by no means dead.

Separation

To differing degrees from culture to culture and community to community, difference is reinforced by separation. Boys play more with boys;

8 These examples may seem anachronistic, but such explicit messages persist. The first is reported by some of the young women in our classes at Stanford and Cornell (though certainly not by all or even most). And the second message was relayed to astronaut Sally Ride in 2001 by a girl whose teacher had offered her that discouragement.

9 Even a child whose own mother is a physician is sometimes heard saying "ladies can't be doctors." Of course kids sometimes get it wrong. An anecdote circulated during Margaret Thatcher's time as prime minister told of a young English boy asked "do you want to be prime minister when you grow up?" "Oh no," he replied, "that's a woman's job."

girls with girls. And this pattern repeats itself cross-culturally, in nonindustrial societies as well as in industrial societies (Whiting and Edwards 1988). The extent to which individuals in western industrial countries grow up participating in same-sex playgroups varies tremendously, depending on such things as the genders and ages of their siblings and their neighbors. Some kids spend more time in same-sex groups at one stage of their lives, less at other stages. The fact remains that however much kids may play in mixed-sex groups, there is a tendency to seek out – and to be constrained to seek out – same-sex groups. This constraint is stronger for boys – girls who prefer playing with boys are tolerated, perhaps admired, while boys who prefer playing with girls are not.

Psychological research shows that many American children begin to prefer same-sex playmates as they approach the age of three (Maccoby 1998), which is about the age at which they develop a clear sense of their own gender, and this preference increases rapidly as they age. Eleanor Maccoby notes that this preference emerges in institutional settings – day care, preschool, and elementary school – where children encounter large numbers of age peers. On the same theme, Thorne (1993) points out that schools provide a sufficiently large population that boys and girls can separate, whereas in neighborhoods there may be less choice.

Even though children lean towards same-sex groups in these settings, they often maintain prior cross-sex friendships formed outside the institution (Howes 1988). It is important to note that the preference for same-sex play groups is not absolute, and that in fact children often play in mixed groups. Maccoby and Jacklin's study (1987) of individual children's choice of playmates in a preschool setting shows four and a half year olds playing in same-sex groups 47 percent of the time, mixed groups 35 percent of the time and other-sex groups (i.e., where the child is the only representative of her or his own sex in the group) 18 percent of the time. While these figures show a good deal of mixing, the same-sex groups are far greater than random playmate selection would produce. And at age six and a half, children in the Maccoby and Jacklin study were playing in same-sex groups 67 percent of the time. Maccoby (1998, pp. 22–23) suggests that the choice of playmates in school is a strategy for ensuring safety and predictability in an open setting, as children seek out others with a recognizable play style. This presupposes different play styles to begin with, presenting a complicated chicken-and-egg problem. For if sex-segregated play groups fill a need for predictable play and interaction styles, they are also a potential site for the production and reproduction of this differentiation. It has been overwhelmingly established that small boys engage in more

physically aggressive behavior than small girls. However, experimental and observational evidence puts this differentiation at precisely the same time that same-sex group preference emerges. Maccoby points out that this play style reaches its peak among boys at about the age of four and that it is restricted to same-sex groups, suggesting that there is a complex relation between the emergence of gendered play styles and of same-sex play groups.

The separation of children in same-sex play groups has led some gender theorists to propose a view that by virtue of their separation during a significant part of their childhoods, boys and girls are socialized into different peer *cultures*. In their same-sex friendship groups, they develop different behavior, different norms, and even different understandings of the world. Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker (1982) argue that because of this separation, boys and girls develop different verbal cultures – different ways of interacting verbally and different norms for interpreting ways of interacting. They argue, further, that this can result in *cross-cultural miscommunication* between males and females. Deborah Tannen (1990) has popularized this view, emphasizing the potential for misunderstanding. The separation of gender cultures does not necessarily entail male–female misunderstanding, although it describes the conditions under which such misunderstanding could develop. Certainly, if girls and boys are segregated on a regular basis, we can expect that they will develop different practices and different understandings of the world. The extent to which this actually occurs depends on the nature of the segregation – when, in what contexts, for what activities – in relation to the actual contact between boys and girls. In other words, to the extent that there is separation, this separation is structured – and it is structured differently in different communities. This structure will have an important bearing on the nature of differences that will develop. It will also have a bearing on the extent to which these differences are recognized.

The miscommunication model that Maltz and Borker proposed and that Tannen has further developed draws on John Gumperz's work with ethnically distinct subcultures (e.g. Gumperz 1982). It hypothesizes both that male and female understandings of interaction are in fact different, and, critically, that they are unaware of these differences, and believe that they are operating from the same understanding. It is the unawareness that may be the most problematic assumption for this approach to gender-based miscommunication (or conflict), since the gender beliefs that most kids are industriously acquiring in their peer groups and outside them emphasize difference, to the point sometimes

of absurd exaggeration. Gender segregation in childhood almost certainly plays some role in the development of gendered verbal practice. But for understanding gender, separation is never the whole picture. Gender segregation in western societies is virtually always embedded in practices that bring the sexes together and that impose difference in interpretations even where there are great similarities in those actions or people being interpreted.

As we move farther along in development, the complexity of explaining gender differences increases exponentially. As kids spend more time with their peers, and as they enter into more kinds of situations with peers, not only does the balance between adult and peer influence change, but the nature of peer influence also changes. Peer society becomes increasingly complex, and at some point quite early on, explicit ideas about gender enter into children's choices, preferences, and opportunities. Whatever the initial factors that give rise to increasing gender separation, separation itself becomes an activity, and a primary social issue. Barrie Thorne (1993) notes that public choosing of teams in school activities constrains gender segregation, hence that games that involve choosing teams are more likely to be same gender, while games that simply involve lining up or being there are more likely to be gender-mixed. Separation can carry over to competitions and rivalries between boys' groups and girls' groups, as in elementary school activities such as "girls chase the boys" (Thorne 1993). These activities can be an important site for the construction of difference with claims that girls or boys are better at whatever activity is in question. In this way, beliefs about differences in males' and females' "natural" abilities may be learned so young and so indirectly that they appear to be common sense. It is not at all clear, therefore, to what extent differences in behaviors and activities result from boys' and girls' personal preference, or from social constraint.

The heterosexual market

Towards the end of elementary school, a highly visible activity of pairing up boys and girls into couples begins to dominate the scene. This activity is not one engaged in by individual children, and it is not an activity that simply arises in the midst of other childhood "business as usual." Rather, it is the beginning of a social market that forms the basis of an emerging peer social order (Eckert 1996). And with this market comes a profound change in the terms of gender separation and difference.

In childhood, it is primarily adults who attend to children's behavior. As the peer social order develops, it takes over much of this function as it develops the means to organize its own social control. Heterosexuality is the metaphor around which the peer social order organizes itself, and a heterosexual market (Thorne 1993) becomes the center of the emerging peer social order. While up until now, boys and girls may have seen themselves as simply different, and perhaps as incompatible, in the context of the heterosexual market, boys and girls emerge as complementary and cooperating factions.

The market metaphor is not frivolous, for the heterosexual market is the first of a series of social markets that the age cohort will engage in on the way to, for example, the academic market and the job market. It is here that both girls and boys will come to see themselves as having a place in a structured system of social evaluation. Kids participating in the heterosexual market can act as both commodity and as broker – they can be paired up, or they can engage in negotiating the pairing up of others. The matches that are made on this market are initially short-lived – a pair may remain "together" for a few hours, a few days, a week, sometimes longer. It is the rapidity of "trades" on the market that establishes individuals' value, and that establishes the nature of value. The rapt attention that the market attracts from those participating in it and even from many nonparticipating observers is part of the establishment of gender norms, as people's worth is recalibrated within the context of heterosexual attractiveness.

It is important to note that for most participants, this activity precedes active heterosexual activity – even dating – by a year or two, as these relationships have little to do with attachments between the members of a pair. The activities establish a system and hierarchy of desirability prior to the actual onset of overt heterosexual desire and activity. One's value on the market is a function of the matches that are made on one's behalf – not so much on the number of matches, but on the people with whom one is matched. The new and enduring status system that forms around this market constitutes the core of the emerging adolescent social order. In this way, the social order is – fundamentally – heterosexual, dramatically changing the terms of the cohort's gender arrangements. What was appropriate for boys and girls simply as male and female individuals now defines them with respect to a social order. Their value as human beings and their relations to others are based in their adherence to gender norms. And the differentiation of these norms intensifies as differentiation of male and female merges with engagement between male and female.

Readers who were developing gay male or lesbian identities during this stage of their lives may think that this account forgets about them. But the point is not that everyone is active in the heterosexual market, or that everyone who participates in this market is heterosexual. This market is the means by which the social order comes to *presume* heterosexuality, marginalizing and rendering deviant any who do not eventually participate. Sometimes there are alternative markets on which to claim worth and value – the academic market, for example – but the heterosexual imperative spreads its umbrella very widely, and because of its central place in the age cohort, it affects all – even those quite averse to any direct participation in it.

There are some cultural contexts where heterosexual coupling is not so early or so central a part of development. Even in the US the heterosexual market was not apparent among such young kids a couple of generations back. In almost all cultures though, eventual marriage is a central social goal that marks adulthood even in cases where the young people themselves do not play a very active role in forging heterosexual links. Most cultures have some kinds of institutions that focus on heterosexual desire among the young and are linked to plans for eventual marriage. The Tamang women of Nepal whom Kathryn March (2002) spoke with, often recalled with great fondness those youthful days in which they and their young female friends went to gatherings where they sang songs to groups of young males who responded with songs of their own. Part of the point of the lyrical exchanges was determining just who might be available marriage partners.

In the US, gender difference and heterosexuality are deeply embedded (and intertwined) in the institution of adolescence and in the formal institution of the high school that houses the age group. Heterosexual couples have a special status in high school – popularity is closely linked to heterosexual alliances, and "famous" couples gain extra visibility and provide theater for their cohort (Eckert 1989). Gender difference and separation are emphasized by such things as mock elections that have male and female counterparts for "most popular," "most likely to succeed," and similar categories. The message in these polls is that being successful or popular is different for males and females – that the terms of these statuses are themselves gendered. Meanwhile, the institutions of prom and homecoming king and queen emphasize the importance of heterosexual alliances, elevating such alliances to institutional status. And the classic pairing of the cheerleader and the football player emphasizes the role of the female supporting the male, as the latter upholds the honor of the institution.

Developing desire

Throughout gender development until the emergence of the heterosexual market, the emphasis has been on difference – on opposition. The heterosexual market brings an important change in the nature of dichotomous thinking, as suddenly, opposites are supposed to attract. Opposition gains the twist of complementarity, and where before male and female might have been in conflict, now they are collaborators. And with this comes the introduction to gender of the conscious element of desire.

Everywhere we look, we see images of the perfect couple. (For a still compelling discussion of the construction of male and female in advertising along these lines, see Goffman, 1976.) They are heterosexual. He is taller, bigger, darker than her. They appear in poses in which he looks straight ahead, confident and direct; she looks down or off into the distance, often dreamily. Standing or sitting, she is lower than him, maybe leaning on him, maybe tucked under his arm, maybe looking up to him. And from the time they are very young, most kids have learned to desire that perfectly matched partner of the other sex. Girls develop a desire to look up at a boyfriend. A girl begins to see herself leaning against his shoulder, him having to lean down to kiss her, or to whisper in her ear. She learns to be scared so she can have him protect her; she learns to cry so he can dry her tears. Girls put on large men's shirts to emphasize their smallness. This concentration of desire, or *cathexis* (Connell 1987), is an extraordinarily powerful force in the maintenance of the gender order. It leads one not simply to desire those in the other sex class, but to form oneself in a particular mold as an object of desire by those others. Girls come to want to feel small and delicate; boys want to feel big and strong. Or at least these are the dominant socially endorsed images of self, images that sometimes rest uncomfortably with such developments as the explosion of girls and women in competitive sports requiring strength and often height or weight. Even the athletic young woman, however, is instructed to work on making her body desirable to men, as is attested by advertising and features in such publications as *Sports Illustrated for Women*. Diets, hairstyling, shaving legs or heads, appetite suppressants, steroids, tattoos, body piercing, makeup: all these and more are in the service of the desired self.[10] Consumption of all kinds is driven by

10 Historian Joan Brumberg (1997) has chronicled the historical development of the contemporary extreme focus in the US on the need for young women to work hard at maintaining and improving their bodies (rather than their souls, which got at least as much or more attention in nineteenth-century America). Indeed, even men are