questioning GENDER

A Sociological Exploration ▪ 4TH EDITION

Robyn Ryle

Questioning Gender

Fourth Edition

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Robyn Ryle

Hanover College

SAGE

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FOR INFORMATION:

SAGE Publications, Inc.
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E-mail: order@sagepub.com

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SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
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Preface to the Fourth Edition

New to the Fourth Edition

The following features are new to the fourth edition:

New Theory Tables

New tables have been included to help students organize and make sense of gender theories.

More Data Tables and Graphics

More tables and graphics have been included, demonstrating the latest research and statistics on gender.

Updated Cultural Artifact Boxes

Cultural Artifact boxes have been brought up to date with more contemporary material.

New Research on Gender and Biology

Expanded discussion in Chapter 1 of new research on the complex, interactional relationship between biology and gender.

New Discussion of Fourth-Wave Feminism, the #MeToo Movement, and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Chapter 2 includes updated discussions of fourth-wave feminism featuring the Women's March in 2016 and the #MeToo movement. Chapter 9 includes new research on the effects of sexual harassment on occupational segregation and the gender wage gap, as well as a breakdown of policies by the 2020 presidential candidates to address the gender wage gap.

Expanded Categories of Sexual Identity

Chapter 5 on sexuality now includes a discussion of asexuality as a category of sexual identity as well as the bisexual umbrella, including identities such as pansexual and demisexual.

More Transgender Issues

Chapter 2 includes a discussion of violence against trans women and specifically trans women of color. Chapter 6 includes new research on transgender dating, and Chapter 8 includes research on transgender families and the household division of labor. Chapter 9 discusses power and politics in transgender rights.

About *Questioning Gender*

Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration is an un-textbook. If textbooks are presumed to be the place you go to get all the answers, this book is an un-textbook in that our goal is to raise as many questions as we can about gender. We explore possible answers to those questions, but our main objective is to start a conversation that will help you to question some of the prevailing assumptions you might have about gender. This book is just the beginning of that conversation, and it is designed to serve as a resource for discussion inside and outside the classroom. *Questioning Gender* is based on the p remise that a good conversation about gender will help you to connect all the complicated scholarship that has been conducted on gender to a thorough investigation of the role of gender in your own life, and for that reason, you'll find this book packed to the brim with questions. Each chapter title is a question, question boxes are inserted in each chapter, questions are included at the end of each Cultural Artifact to help you think about the prevalence of gender in our everyday lives, and Big Questions are provided at the end of each chapter to help you make connections. This un-textbook uses a wide range of theories from within and without sociology, assuming that theories are useful for the ways in which they can suggest new questions or focus the questions you already have. Then, for a wide range of topics related to gender, including socialization, sexuality, friendship and dating, bodies, marriage and families, work, and media and politics, we use a historical and cross-cultural perspective to question the things we might think we know about gender. In this book, we'll unpack many of the truths we take for granted about our social lives related to gender, turning basic concepts like sex, marriage, love, and friendship into moving targets with many potential meanings depending on who you are and when and where you happened to be born. We place the experiences of people who are usually at the margin of gender conversations (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender; women and men of color; women and men of the global South; and poor and working-class women and men) at the center of our conversations because their experiences throw open the door on a whole new set of questions that need to be asked about gender. As I tell the students in my own gender course, if you finish this book with more questions about gender than you started with, our goal will have been accomplished and you'll be well on your way to a lifetime conversation about what gender is and what it means in your own life.

The primary course this text is aimed at is sociology of gender. It is ideal for upper-class undergraduate students (juniors and seniors), although it is cast at a level that makes it accessible to lower-class undergraduates as well. The text is firmly grounded within a sociological approach to gender, with a focus on sociological theories related to gender and research within social science disciplines. However, it is impossible to discuss gender in a contemporary context without also addressing theories from outside sociology, such as feminist theories and queer theory. Because of this interdisciplinary approach, *Questioning Gender* is appropriate for introductory courses in women's studies and gender studies as well. This text is

best suited for courses that seek to use the social construction of gender in a global and historical perspective to challenge students' preconceptions about gender and to demonstrate how gender as a system creates and reinforces inequality.

Unique Approaches

There are several unique approaches in *Questioning Gender* that set it apart from other gender textbooks. First, *Questioning Gender* takes a global approach to gender. In an increasingly global world, it is difficult to justify an approach to gender issues that focuses solely on the United States or the developed world. Examining gender in a global context also helps to demonstrate the social construction of gender and the persistence of gender inequality around the world. For some of the same reasons, *Questioning Gender* also uses an intersectional approach. Since women of color first brought attention to the ways in which gender intersects with race and ethnicity, those who study gender have become increasingly concerned with how to discuss gender while grounding it firmly within the complex web of identities such as race, class, sexuality, disability, religious background, and so on. Gender does not exist in a vacuum, and an intersectional approach helps to demonstrate that there is no "normal" experience of what it means to be gendered. *Questioning Gender* is also unique in incorporating the perspective of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender individuals as well as queer theory throughout the textbook. As it is the goal of many instructors to help students understand the social construction of gender, focusing on transgender concerns helps to blur the boundaries between male and female, masculine and feminine, and homosexual and heterosexual, previously perceived as rigid. Queer theory questions all categories of difference, and the experiences and perspectives of transgender individuals provide a vantage point for students to see beyond our dimorphic gender constructions. *Questioning Gender* also assumes that questions related to gender must be answered through a consideration of both women and men and, therefore, includes the growing scholarship on the study of men and masculinity. These unique approaches to gender in *Questioning Gender* help to create a textbook that resists the tendency to normalize certain understandings of gender while marginalizing others. For example, many textbooks segregate discussions of gender in a global perspective into one chapter or certain sections of the chapter. In this book, global experiences of gender are incorporated throughout the text, decentering the idea of a Western, predominant idea of what it means to be a man or a woman. In addition, rather than segregating a discussion of transgender issues into a chapter on sexuality or biology, *Questioning Gender* integrates these concerns throughout in discussions about a wide variety of topics, including socialization, work, and dating.

The final distinctive approach in *Questioning Gender* is the integration of theoretical perspectives throughout the text. Many textbooks cover theory in the first few chapters and then move on to a topical focus on gender. In this book, theory is covered in early chapters, but it is then discussed throughout the book as each theory applies to different topics. This use of theory throughout the text is highlighted for students and instructors through Theory Alerts. This approach reminds students of

the importance of theory to our understanding of gender, and it models for them how different theories might be applied to different topics related to gender. Other key features of the text, as defined in the next section, such as Cultural Artifacts, question boxes, and Big Questions, all incorporate theory. In this way, *Questioning Gender* seeks to put theory at the center of discussions of gender rather than at the periphery.

Key Features of the Text

Question Boxes

Distributed throughout each chapter in *Questioning Gender* are question boxes. Question boxes contain discussion questions that push students to explore or further test the theories and concepts being discussed. These boxes are integrated with the material to which they relate and are specific to that material. Question boxes serve as starting points for students and instructors in beginning their discussions and explorations of gender in their own lives. So, for example, in a discussion of research on heteronormativity in high schools in Chapter 5, a question box asks students, "Can you think of other examples of heteronormativity on your college or university campus, or other ways in which practices and values reinforce the idea that heterosexuality is normal and right?" Question boxes can be used by students to enhance their experience of reading the text or by instructors in the classroom to generate discussion or as prompts for free-writes, short response papers, or journals.

Cultural Artifacts

Also distributed throughout the text are Cultural Artifact boxes. The premise of using cultural artifacts is adapted from an assignment I use in my own classroom in which students have to bring in some artifact related to gender to share with the class once over the course of the semester. These gender artifacts are anything they observe that is related to gender and have included television commercials, YouTube clips, magazine articles, print advertisements, comic strips, viral e-mails, conversations, sports equipment (men's and women's basketballs), and personal hygiene products (men's and women's shampoo, deodorant, razors). Cultural Artifact boxes attempt to accomplish the same goal as this class assignment in encouraging students to begin to see gender all around them in their daily lives. Cultural Artifact boxes include references to films, television shows, music, websites, and video games as they help to illustrate key concepts discussed in the text. This feature helps students to make connections between sociological theories and concepts related to gender and the everyday world around them; this allows them to consider how gender matters in their daily lives.

Big Questions

At the end of each chapter are Big Questions. Big Questions accomplish one of three goals. First, some Big Questions get students to apply concepts and theories to

a broader set of issues or questions than those discussed in that particular chapter. These often take the form of "what if" questions, and they ask students to expand in directions only hinted at in the chapter. On a smaller scale, some Big Questions ask students to think about integrating concepts and ideas within the chapter. An example might be looking at how two different theories discussed in the chapter fit together or how a theory applied to one particular topic in the chapter might work when applied to a different topic. Finally, some Big Questions encourage students to make connections between concepts, theories, or topics discussed in that particular chapter with those discussed in other chapters in the book. All of these different types of questions encourage students to think of the "big picture" as it relates to gender and address some of the larger themes identified in the book. They encourage students and instructors to use the book interactively by making their own connections between different concepts and ideas within the book as well as by expanding beyond the topics covered in the book. Big Questions may be used as the basis for longer, critical thinking essays; as essay examination questions; or as prompts for small-group discussions or debate exercises.

Gender Exercises

Gender Exercises are more interactive than Big Questions and encourage students to embark on their own projects of gender inquiry. Gender Exercises suggest ways in which students could use social science techniques like interviews, observation, surveys, and statistics to investigate gender for themselves. They also introduce exercises that help students apply theory to a particular situation from their own lives or popular culture to understand that theory better. In Chapter 7 on gender and bodies, a Gender Exercise asks students to visit a local art museum or look at images of art online and think about how male and female bodies are depicted. Gender Exercises could be used by students and instructors as the basis for research projects or research exercises. These exercises help encourage students to become active learners and to engage in social science research techniques.

What Can You Do? Resources for Social Change

Students reading about gender inequality and other ways in which the gender system lets us down are sometimes impatient for ways in which they can take action to make things better. They ask, "What can I do?" New to the fourth edition are lists of websites at the ends of most chapters that provide a starting point for students interested in exploring social change. These websites highlight organizations both national and global. All are dedicated to addressing a wide variety of social problems related to gender. In Chapter 7, students can explore the wide variety of initiatives pursued by the National Women's Health Network. OutRight Action International, one of the organizations listed in Chapter 5, advocates LGBTQ rights on a global scale. For instructors, these lists provide a potential starting point for more in-depth research projects about gender issues as well as for the inclusion of service learning activities.

Terms and Suggested Readings

Important terms and concepts are highlighted and included in a list at the end of each chapter. This feature helps students and instructors to organize information presented in the chapter with the goal of learning how to apply these terms and concepts to other gender issues and situations. Each chapter also includes a list of suggested readings organized by different topics covered in that chapter. This can serve as a resource for students and instructors interested in finding out more about some of the issues discussed in the chapters and as a good starting place for student research papers.

Organization of the Text

Part I: What Are the Important Questions to Ask About Gender?

These first three chapters set up the basic foundations for an exploration of gender. They introduce the main goals in learning about gender, the basic theories that help us to understand gender, and the ways in which those theories are used throughout the text. Chapter 1 introduces and defines basic concepts in the exploration of gender and discusses why the study of gender is a worthwhile pursuit. Chapter 2 explores the feminist background of many gender theories and outlines sociological theories of gender. In Chapter 3, we explore gender theories from disciplines outside sociology, including psychology, queer theory, development theory, and ecofeminist theories of gender.

Part II: How Are Our Lives Filled With Gender?

This section focuses on everyday aspects of gender through a more interactional, micro-level approach to issues. In this part of the book, students begin to consider the ways in which gender matters in their daily lives and how that impact is socially constructed historically and globally. In Chapter 4, we explore questions related to socialization and theories that explain how we learn to be gendered. The gender of sexuality is explored in Chapter 5, where we look at the complicated ways in which sexuality and gender intersect. Chapter 6 explores the gender of friendship in dating, including the different ways in which attraction works on a global scale and how the gender of friendship has changed over time. In Chapter 7, we look at the gender of bodies, including issues of body image and health.

Part III: How Is Gender an Important Part of the Way Our Society Works?

This portion of *Questioning Gender* moves toward a focus on how gender permeates various institutions in society. Working at the institutional, macro level, these chapters are more concerned with how gender operates as a system of power and reinforces inequality. In Chapter 8, we examine the important intersections between gender, marriage, and families, taking a historical look at how marriage

as an institution has changed over time and how this has affected ideas about gender. Chapter 9 looks at how the institution of the workplace has gendered implications, including a consideration of sex segregation and the gender wage gap. The unique intersections between gender and the media as an institution are examined in Chapter 10. Finally, Chapter 11 explores gender in the realm of states and governments through a consideration of the politics of gender.

A Note on Language

Like many other authors, I chose to capitalize "Black" but not "white" in this textbook. Being Black in America constitutes an ethnic group, similar in its sense of belonging and group cohesion to Irish Americans, Arab Americans, and many other groups. Being white in the United States generally does not carry with it this sense of ethnic identity and belonging, although ethnic identities such as Polish, Italian, or German might. Although both categories are socially constructed and have no underlying scientific basis, I chose to mark this distinction in how the categories are experienced.

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My final thanks are to all the students at Hanover College over the years who served as guinea pigs in the long process of figuring out how to teach a good course on the sociology of gender. I learned how to teach about gender from learning with you and could not have had the courage to put one word on the page without the memories of our shared laughter and exploration, and I could not have sustained myself over the long haul without the hope that I could pass along to others some of the joy of learning together that we experienced.

PART

I

What Are the Important Questions to Ask About Gender?

CHAPTER

1

What Is Gender and Why Should We Care About It?

Introducing Gender

What do students expect when they sit down on the first day in a class on sociology and gender? What notions do they already have about what gender is and how it matters? How important do they believe gender is to their own lives? What are the stories they tell themselves about gender? These are questions I often ask *myself* about gender, and let me just say at the outset, I certainly don't claim to have all the answers. Learning about gender inevitably involves learning about yourself and your own life. When we combine gender and sociology, it also involves learning about the importance of social forces as they relate to gender. When you begin to think seriously about the impact of gender on your life and the larger world, it becomes difficult not to see gender everywhere you look. You can decide for yourself whether that's a good or a bad thing, but I believe that being aware of the ways in which gender permeates our lives can give us invaluable insight into the world.

Swimming With the Fishes: Learning to See Gender

Part of what we will be doing throughout this book is learning to see gender in the world around us. That might seem like a fairly stupid goal at first; most of us believe that we can see gender in the world. Let's imagine we're standing on a busy sidewalk in a city somewhere. As the people walk by, we believe we can identify the gender of most of them with a fairly high degree of certainty. Every now and then someone might walk by who gives us pause, but by and large, we believe that we're pretty good at **gender attribution**, or reading the many different cues people present in order to decide whether someone is a woman or a man (even though limiting ourselves to these two categories could leave out a lot of people, as we'll discuss later). This chapter will begin to cast some doubt on whether what we're seeing when people walk by is really gender, as well as how useful it is to put people into gender categories in the first place.

But we'll also begin to extend exactly what we mean by *seeing gender*. Seeing gender the way we'll talk about it involves more than just identifying the gender of the people around us. It means beginning to reveal the ways in which gender works, which are not always apparent on the surface of our lives. This is what

Judith Lorber (1994) means when she describes gender as being like water to fish. For many people who study this topic, gender is the substance that's all around us and inside us but that we largely take for granted. Learning to see gender means developing a special kind of vision.

Gender and the Social Construction of Reality

One particularly useful tool that sociologists have to help us develop this kind of gender vision is called *the social construction of reality*. If you've taken sociology classes before, there's a strong chance you've heard of this concept. The social construction of reality describes the historical process by which our experiences of the world are put into categories and treated as real things (Roy, 2001). What does this mean in relation to gender? Probably the best way to help us understand the social construction of reality as it relates to gender is to use the **Thomas principle**, from W. I. and Dorothy Thomas (1928), which states, "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (p. 572). Take categories of race as an example. Anthropologists and biologists have definitively shown that there is no biological basis for what we think of as racial categories. Extensive research using DNA from people all over the planet demonstrates that among the small amount of genetic variation that exists in humans as a species, most exists within the groups we commonly refer to as *races*.

What this means is that any two people within what we think of as a racial category (white or Caucasian, for example) are as likely to be genetically different from each other as they are from someone in what we think of as a different racial category (Hispanics or Latinos, for example). Genetic variation among humans simply does not map along racial lines, in part because the genes that influence skin color, hair form, and facial features (the traits we generally associate with race) evolved much later in our human history than other characteristics like intelligence, athletic ability, and musical ability (Adelman, 2003).

How does this help us understand the social construction of reality? Over time, people began to believe that things like skin color, hair form, and facial features meant something more than they actually do. The categories of both white and Black were created over a long historical time period and were used to justify a system of exploitation and oppression. Today, many people believe that these categories are real things, based in some underlying biological reality. But historically, the definitions of who is white, Black, Latino, Asian, or Native American in the United States have constantly shifted. From 1790, the first year the United States conducted a census, up to 2000, the way in which race was measured changed every time. Race is just one example of how, through a historical process, people's experiences of the world (seeing different skin colors) were put into categories (Black, white, Asian, Latino, Native American) and treated as real things.

Scientists can demonstrate for you that race has no underlying biological reality, but that doesn't mean race has no impact on the lives of people in the United States and around the world. This is the second part of the Thomas principle—that

what we believe is real is real in its consequences. As we discuss throughout this book, glaring inequalities exist along racial lines. These inequalities are not a result of any biological explanations but rather caused by the ways in which our belief in racial categories as something real makes them into something that has real consequences. When a teacher assumes that a clock made by an Arab American student is a bomb because of our association between race and terrorism (a true event that happened to 14-year-old Ahmen Mohamed in Irving, Texas, in 2015), knowing that the category "Arab American" is socially constructed doesn't do that student much good. In the social world (which is the world we all live in), what we believe matters, and the things we treat as real become, for all intents and purposes, real.

Once we understand the ways in which the world around us is socially constructed, we can begin to untangle the complex ways in which our understanding of the world is shaped by our particular social constructions. Understanding the social construction of gender helps us to see the water in which we're swimming, as well as to understand why we didn't notice it in the first place. In this book, we use two specific methods to see the social constructions around us. The first, which we've already considered in our discussion of race, is a *historical* approach. Part of what makes things seem real is the sense that this is how they always have been and how they always will be. A historical approach helps us see that this is very often not the case.

The second approach that helps us reveal social constructions is *cross-cultural*. If something that you very much believe is real in your particular culture is perceived as ridiculously impossible in another culture, what exactly is real? Cross-culturally, racial categories become even more complicated. In many Latin American countries, members of the same family can be categorized in different racial groups based on their skin color; this means that your sibling may be considered white while you are considered Black. Many people around the world find that their racial category changes as they move from place to place and country to country. What does this say about the reality of these categories? Throughout this book, we use both the historical approach and the cross-cultural approach to help us see the ways in which gender is also socially constructed.

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Does thinking of a category as based in biology change the discrimination people in that category face? Are people less likely to be prejudiced against a certain group if they believe the identity is biological and, therefore, out of our control? Has this been true for social categories in the past?

Gender and Intersectionality

There's another perspective that draws our attention to the variations in experiences of gender, this time across intersecting categories such as race, social class, sexuality, age, and disability. It's called **intersectionality**, and it's both a theoretical orientation and a frame for activism. We'll discuss intersectionality in more depth in Chapter 2, but for now, it's important to understand the way intersectionality

draws our attention to variations and contradictions in the way people in different social categories experience gender. An intersectional approach pushes us to avoid blanket statements about all men or all women in favor of asking questions about *which* women or *which* men? When we talk about the privileges men have as a group, does that include all men or mostly white, cisgender, straight, middle-class men? How would the experiences of an Asian American transgender man be different? Intersectionality makes us aware that we do not experience all our overlapping identities separately. We are always simultaneously gendered *and* raced, classed, sexualized, and embodied. To understand how gender works, we must understand it in its full complexity, as it intersects with other identities.

Sex or Gender: What's the Difference?

By now you might have noticed an important relationship between biology and our perceptions of reality; race is perceived as something that's real because many people believe in its biological truth. This is true in many parts of the world where science forms a dominant way of thinking about the world. If something is rooted in our biology, it can be empirically and objectively observed and must, therefore, be real. Later, we'll explore the way in which even our trust in science is gendered and has gender implications.

Biological explanations of gender differences are often called on to establish their reality, and this brings us to our first point of vocabulary, the difference between *sex* and *gender*. When I ask students in my sociology of gender class early in the semester what the difference is between sex and gender, they usually agree that sex describes the biological differences between women and men while gender pertains to the social differences. Although not everyone follows this general usage, this is a fairly accurate description of how social scientists employ these terms. Sex describes the biological differences between people we call males and people we call females; gender is the social meanings layered onto those differences. This neat division leaves sex category up to those concerned with biology and gender up to those interested in the social world. For much of the history of the study of gender in the Anglo-European world, this was a standard way of understanding sex and gender, and it was often called a biosocial approach.

A Biosocial Approach

A **biosocial approach** to the study of gender acknowledges that much of what we experience regarding gender is socially constructed. There are differences in how gender as a social category is constructed across historical time periods and across different places. However, from the biosocial perspective, there are real limits to that social construction because of the biological reality of male and female bodies. One way to understand this perspective is to say that biosocialists believe in **sexual dimorphism**. Sexual dimorphism is the claim that sex marks a

distinction between two physically and genetically discrete categories of people. If you subscribe to sexual dimorphism, you believe that we can use certain characteristics to sort people objectively into two categories called male and female. Discrete here means that you can only be one or the other (male or female) and not both at the same time. This sorting usually happens when you're born and someone, usually a doctor, decides whether you're a girl or a boy. This process is called **gender assignment**. Biosocialists do not believe that our sex category is the only thing that determines how we interact with the world; gender is constructed onto the differences we call sex. But they do believe that there are two kinds of people in the world—females and males.

At this point, you might be thinking to yourself, *well, duh!* Who doesn't believe that there are two types of people in the world, males and females? Even a child knows that there are girls and there are boys, and that's sex, right? Or is it? If you stood on a busy street, watching people walk by, would you be using sex or gender to categorize people? Genitalia are one of the physical criteria we use to sort people into sex categories. Can you see people's genitalia when they're walking down the street? Perhaps there are some streets where people are walking around naked or with their genitalia exposed but generally not.

What can we see of sex category in our everyday lives? We can see the shape of people's bodies and their faces. If someone has breasts, does that mean the person is a woman? Is that a criterion we could use? Yes, except that some men have breasts (or there would have been no need for Kramer, a character on the hit sitcom *Seinfeld*, to invent the "bro," a bra for men) and some women do not. What about facial hair? We can certainly see facial hair. And yet, again, some men do not have facial hair, and some women do. In her study of trans men in the workplace, Kristen Schilt (2010) found that facial hair often trumped several other gender clues pointing toward femininity in gender attribution for trans men. That is, even if someone could see a feminine name and the presence of breasts, the presence of facial hair meant they'd still refer to that person as *he*. Maybe an Adam's apple? Again, not all men have them and not all women lack them. On average, women should be slightly shorter than men, but again, we also encounter very short men and very tall women. Schilt would argue that what you're really seeing as you stand on the street is **cultural genitalia**, or the outward performance of gender that we then assume to match up with biological genitalia.

A Strong Social Constructionist Approach

Unlike a biosocial approach, the **strong social constructionist approach** argues that both sex *and* gender are socially constructed. In fact, you might argue from this perspective that gender—social meanings—is really all there is. Our gender beliefs cause us to think there are real categories out there called "female" and "male," but the reality is much more complex. Sex category itself is socially constructed, and therefore, it is culture that dictates how we understand sex.

There are at least four areas of evidence in support of this perspective. The first type of evidence points our attention to the ways in which biological differences can be influenced by social reality. This helps us see how the social can influence the biological. For example, one biological difference between women and men is that, on average, men have 20% to 30% greater bone mass and strength than women (Wade & Ferree, 2015). Keep in mind that, as we discuss more in Chapter 3, average differences mean that there's still a great deal of overlap. Some women have greater bone mass and strength than some men, and some men have lesser bone mass and strength than some women. Differences in the average population emerge only after puberty and become more pronounced when women lose bone mass after menopause (Avdagić et al., 2009). This biological reality explains why women over the age of 50 are 4 times more likely to be diagnosed with osteoporosis than men of the same age (International Osteoporosis Foundation, 2015).

But studies suggest that somewhere between 10% to 50% of the differences in bone mass can be due to lifestyle choices such as diet, physical activity, and smoking rather than genetics (Office of the Surgeon General, 2004). In fact, one study shows that among Orthodox Jewish adolescent boys, the development of bone mass proceeds very differently. In these communities, boys spend a great deal of their childhoods engaged in the intensive study of religious documents. This means they spend much less time engaged in physical activity. As a result, their bones fail to grow as strong as the bones of their sisters, who are freed by this particular set of gender norms to spend more time running, jumping, and playing. In this community, socially constructed ideas about gender—that boys should spend much of their time studying religious texts while girls should spend less time in such activities—has an effect on the physical bodies of girls and boys and, eventually, women and men. The beliefs of the Orthodox Jewish community—their social reality—are imprinted onto the physical bodies of their daughters and sons. Gender shapes sex.

Another biological reality students in my classes often point to is research on brain differences between women and men. Women, they might point out, have smaller brains, different brain composition, and different brain function (Halpern, 2012). It is true that there are some differences in the brains of women and men, but it's important to note here that it's increasingly difficult to tell if these differences are genetic or shaped by our environments, including our social environment. New findings suggest that our brains have a great deal of plasticity, or ability to change and respond to the environment. This plasticity includes changes in the structure and function of our brains. Studies show that it might be easier than we previously thought to alter brain function. In one study, 3 months of playing the video game Tetris among young girls resulted in brains that were heavier and showed enhanced cortical thickness (Haier, Karama, Leyba, & Jung, 2009).

The same complexity applies to hormones, which are often believed to be a biological identifier of sex category. New research tells us that the production and presence of hormones are influenced by social interaction. Men's testosterone

levels decrease if they are in close relationships with women and are actively involved with their children (Alvergne, Faurie, & Raymond, 2009; Booth, Granger, Mazur, & Kivlighan, 2006; Gettler, McDade, Feanil, & Kuzawa, 2011; Mazur & Booth, 1998; Storey, Walsh, Quinton, & Edwards, 2000; van Anders & Watson, 2007). In societies where it's normal for fathers to be involved parents, men's average testosterone levels are lower than in societies where it's not normal (Muller, Marlowe, Bugumba, & Ellison, 2009). Position in a hierarchy can affect testosterone levels as well. Being suddenly positioned below others in a hierarchy, as at the beginning of boot camp, is correlated with a drop in testosterone that can last for several weeks (Kreuz & Rose, 1972; Thompson, Dabbs, & Frady, 1990). This research suggests that the relationship between the social world and our biological bodies is much more complicated and interactive than any simplistic description.

Studies like these suggest that we need a more complex way of thinking about the relationship between the social and the biological. This new model would acknowledge that though our underlying biology is important and can't be discounted, the interaction between our bodies and the social environment does not flow in one causal direction. As strong social constructionists argue, our social beliefs can have a crucial impact on bodies—our bones, brains, and muscles, for example. Our social reality is written onto the physical stuff of our biological bodies.

Intersex and the Social Construction of Sex

A second source of evidence for the strong social constructionist approach comes from the existence of intersex and the experiences of intersex individuals. If we accept the claims of sexual dimorphism, we should be able to come up with some universal criteria for sorting everyone into a sex category. But strong social constructionists point to the ways in which not everyone fits so easily into categories of male and female or man and woman. If we start by defining men as people with penises and women as people with vaginas, we'll quickly discover that some people have both. Where do they fit?

People born with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) have XX chromosomes but masculinization of the genitalia. As infants, these babies have what appears to be a penis as well as a vagina. Individuals born with androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS) have XY chromosomes but feminized genitalia, which often means they have a vagina as well as testes (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). As we will read in Chapter 4, these infants are unlikely to make it into adulthood with their genitalia intact because doctors in the United States usually perform surgery on intersex infants to create a consistent sex category for them. Thus, the infant with CAH is likely to have the penis removed, whereas the infant with AIS is likely to be raised as a girl despite the presence of testes and the development of masculine secondary sex characteristics at puberty.

Gender scholars identify individuals who have any of a wide number of variations of genitalia, hormones, internal anatomy, or chromosomes that are outside the typical male/female binary as **intersex**. Intersex variations are estimated to occur at a rate of 1.7% of all births, making intersex infants more common than

albinism (being born albino or lacking skin pigmentation). In a city of 300,000 people, 5,100 of them would have intersex variations, meaning that there's a chance someone walking down your city sidewalk might in fact have both a penis and a vagina. How would you decide their sex?

We could say that although we can't necessarily see sex category with the naked eye, we live in the 21st century; there are other ways to determine sex. There are internal sex organs. Today, medical doctors generally use the presence or absence of a penis to initially assign gender. In the past, doctors went by internal organs and emphasized the presence or absence of a uterus, because without a uterus a woman could not reproduce. But intersex variations deal with both internal and external genitalia. Some intersex individuals have both an ovary and a testis, one on each side of their body. In other individuals, the ovary and testis grow together, forming an ovo-testis. The presence or absence of internal sex organs is also an imperfect method of determining sex category.

What about hormones, then? What we call sex hormones are not differentiated in children before they reach puberty, and postpuberty, there are wide variations in the presence and absence of sex hormones. Individuals with androgen insensitivity syndrome have testosterone in their bodies, but they cannot metabolize it and, therefore, develop breasts at puberty. Is the presence of testosterone, then, a good measure of who's a man and who's a woman? What about genetics? As we learn in high school biology, men have XY sex chromosomes while women have XX sex chromosomes. Does modern genetic testing provide a definitive answer to sex category? No. Those born with Turner syndrome lack a second sex chromosome, making them XO, whereas those with Klinefelter's syndrome have two X chromosomes and a Y (XXY). How should we identify the sex of someone who is XXY or XO?

Transgender People and the Social Construction of Sex

To the complications that intersex variations bring to the idea of sex category, you might also add the complexities of the transgender community as a third body of evidence for the strong social constructionist approach. **Transgender** is a broad label that includes a wide variety of people who seek to change, cross, or go beyond culturally defined gender categories (Ferber, Holcomb, & Wentling, 2008). The term includes many ways to express gender, not all of which line up with the binary sex categories of female and male. Some transgender individuals seek surgery to change their underlying anatomy. For example, a trans man is someone who was assigned a feminine gender when they were born but whose gender identity is masculine. Other transgender people identify as nonbinary, which means their gender identity is neither masculine nor feminine. Agender individuals have no gender. Children as young as 4 or 5 years old express that the gender they were assigned at birth does not match their internal sense of who they are. People who live outside or beyond the binary have always existed, throughout human history and across cultures. How do we fit this reality into a biosocial

approach, where sex category is supposed to provide a real limit on the ways in which gender is expressed?

Historical and Cross-Cultural Evidence

Strong social constructionists also use the historical and cross-cultural approaches as evidence, pointing to the ways in which sex categories have, in fact, varied across time and place. These examples make up our fourth source of evidence. Today, in Anglo-European societies, we believe there are two sexes. But as we discuss in Chapter 5, the ancient Greeks believed in a one-sex model (Roy, 2001). Females were not a completely different sex than males, but they were an inferior version of males in a hierarchy that included the gods and other kinds of people (for example, slaves, dwarves, eunuchs). This particular gender system (a set of cultural beliefs) shaped the ways in which the Greeks saw biological reality. The Greeks saw the vagina and the penis as the same organ; in women this organ was internal (vagina), whereas in men it was external (penis). Similarly, the Greeks saw ovaries and testes as the same organ in males and females. The same biological reality was used to justify a completely different understanding of sex.

Strong social constructionists also point to a wide range of cultures that have a third sex category, or a space within their particular conceptualization for people considered neither male nor female. These include the hijras in India, the two-spirits in Native American cultures, the kathoeys of Thailand, and the sworn virgins of the Balkans (Nanda, 2000). If different societies construct different kinds of sex categories, not all of which are based on a dimorphic system (only males and females), then surely sex categories are socially constructed. Gender, in the form of cultural meanings, therefore produces our notions of sex, rather than the other way around.

Table 1.1 compares the biosocial and strong social constructionist approaches.

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Think of a behavioral trait that is generally associated with one sex or the other (for example, crying, fighting, looking pretty, nurturing). Can you think of examples of females who engage in the behaviors generally associated with males or of males who engage in the behaviors generally associated with females?

Sex or Gender?

The debate between biosocial and strong social constructionist perspectives is ongoing, but it has important implications for how we think about the relationship between sex and gender. From the strong social constructionist perspective, we're always talking about gender because there really is no such thing as sex. This doesn't mean that biology doesn't exist and that people don't have bodies. It also doesn't mean that people don't have differences in their genitalia, DNA, sex hormones, and other biological realities. But for strong social constructionists, these biological differences do not line up with the categories we have created and labeled sex, and the claim that they do is false.

Table 1.1 Biosocial and Strong Social Constructionist Approaches Compared

Approach	Position on Sexual Dimorphism	View of Relationship Between Sex and Gender	Stance on Intersex and Transgender
Biosocial	There are two distinct, biologically discrete types of people, male and female; sexual dimorphism is true.	Sex partially produces gender and sets real limits on the expression of gender.	Aberrations must be fit into a dimorphic system.
Strong social constructionist	There are not two distinct types of people, male and female; sexual dimorphism is a claim but not the truth.	Gender produces sex; our ideas about gender shape how we make sense of biological reality.	Evidence demonstrates that the dimorphic system does not accurately describe reality where sex and gender are concerned.

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Which of these two perspectives makes more sense to you? Which is easier to understand? Which do you think is the more commonly held perspective?

As sociologists who understand the importance of social construction, in this textbook we assume a strong social constructionist perspective. This means that most of the time we talk about gender rather than sex categories, assuming that both are socially constructed. We talk about women and men rather than females and males.

A Word About Biology and Strong Social Constructionism

The idea that sex categories are socially constructed—that there are *not* two kinds of distinguishable male and female bodies in the world—is hard to swallow for some people. Students are often left wondering whether biology exists at all from the strong social constructionist perspective. Are these theorists arguing that there are no such things as penises, vaginas, testes, hormones, or chromosomes? Are they saying that we don't have physical, biological bodies at all?

Most theorists who argue from the strong social constructionist point of view would say that, yes, of course we have physical bodies. The problem is that our categories—male and female—don't accurately describe the reality of those physical bodies. In fact, many would argue that the diversity in our physical bodies is greater than our categories would lead us to believe. They might go so far as to argue that our belief in how bodies *should* be gets in the way of our perceiving the way bodies *actually are*. Because we believe that everyone should have a penis or a

vagina, we tend to ignore the repeated cases of people who have both. Because we believe that the gender you're assigned at birth should line up with the gender you live, we stigmatize transgender people who violate these norms.

In other words, strong social constructionists believe that our social ideas about what sex categories should look like get in the way of our seeing what the actual biological reality is.

Some Notes About Vocabulary

Language is an important component that shapes our social construction of reality, and so it matters for our conversations about gender. Historically, masculine pronouns were used in much writing because "men" was perceived as a universal category. So "mankind," at least in theory, refers to both women and men. In this book, I use masculine and feminine pronouns interchangeably.

In English, *sex* can mean both the biological categories of males and females as well as engaging in some kind of sexual act (a subject we return to in Chapter 5). Because of this confusion, it's sometimes easier to use the term *sex category* to distinguish between these two meanings of the word. You will see these two terms used interchangeably throughout this book.

We already introduced the concept of transgender, but you'll also encounter the word *cisgender* in this book. Cisgender refers to people whose sex category and gender identity match up. If your gender assignment at birth was female and you choose to live as a woman, you're cisgender.

Why Study Gender?

This question—why study gender—brings us back to some of the questions with which we began this introduction. You may have your own reasons that bring you to this book, but the general answer to this question is that gender matters. Perhaps you've already noticed the ways in which gender matters in your own life. In this book, we push that understanding even further by raising questions about what gender is and how it operates. Our journey can be summarized with three main goals. First, we'll be building an understanding of the ways in which gender is socially constructed in a global, historical, and intersectional context. One fundamental truth about gender that those who study this topic have arrived at is that gender varies a great deal based on where, when, and who you are. We'll be using all three perspectives to explore those complexities.

Our second goal in this textbook is to debunk any ideas about what is normal and abnormal in regard to gender. We do this through looking at gender globally and by being intersectional—by placing the experiences of people of color, gay and lesbian people, transgender people, and working-class people at the center rather than at the margins of our inquiries. Looking at what it means to be a gay man or a Middle Eastern woman or a nonbinary white person should not teach

us what it means to be different from some unspoken norm (straight, white cis women and cis men), but it should help reveal the unique lessons to be learned about gender in the experiences of many different kinds of people.

Because of this goal, the particular language we use to talk about different experiences and places in the world is important. The term *Western* assumes a geographic centering but also an economic and social one. Societies are Western if they see Europe as the center of the world, and this terminology derives from colonial philosophy. We generally use the term *Western* or *Anglo-European* when we refer to cultural phenomena. But you will also hear terminology like *developing* and *developed* or *global North* and *global South*, which reflect different ways of understanding global divisions.

We emphasize the social construction of gender, but remember from the Thomas principle that just because something is socially constructed doesn't mean it has no real consequences for people's lives. Gender may be socially constructed, but it is also a system of inequality; understanding gender in this light is the third goal we pursue. What we believe about gender has real consequences for the lives of people around the world. Gender distributes power to people. As we will explore, it may cut short the lives of many men; cause some women to live with the fear of physical assault; and influence how much pleasure you experience in your sexual life, how much money you make, and how much leisure time you have. When we begin to see gender around us, we will also begin to see the ways in which gender sometimes works to help some and hurt others. But we argue that as a system that distributes privilege, gender can negatively affect everyone at some point in their lives. For many people who study gender, the answer to the question "Why study gender?" is that understanding gender is the first step toward deciding what needs to be changed and then taking action.

There are a lot of questions about gender to be asked and a lot of answers to be explored. Many answers contradict each other. During one semester of my sociology of gender course, a student complained after class that his head hurt—not because of a hangover or too much yelling but because the class was making him think too much. Can you think too much about gender? Perhaps. Sometimes students are frustrated by the lack of easy answers when it comes to gender, but asking questions seems to be the first step in finding out something that's truly meaningful to you, and that is what we seek to do in this book.

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CHAPTER

2

What's the "Sociology" in the Sociology of Gender?

Understanding Sociology and Gender

Why Do You Need Theory to Understand Gender?

Students hear the word *theory*, even as it relates to something as interesting as the study of gender, and have one of several possible reactions. They may become nervous and uneasy at the prospect of trying to grasp seemingly unreachable, complex concepts. They may roll their eyes and sigh loudly while muttering, "What does theory matter to me?" A few students may anticipate with great enthusiasm the intellectual endeavor that learning to understand and apply theory involves. But I suspect those students may be in the minority, and their eagerness may cause more eye rolling and sighing on the part of some of their classmates. Given the difficulty of learning theory and the anxiety it may cause, why is it important to understand theories about gender?

Learning and understanding gender theories becomes a little less scary when you realize that everyone already has some working theory about gender and the way it operates in the world. From the first moment someone said to you as a small child, "That's what girls do and not what boys do," you probably began to develop your own explanation for why that was so. As we get older, our theories about how gender works become more sophisticated. They may be grounded in a sense that we act in gendered ways because of our biology or because that's what everyone around us seems to expect. We may have a working explanation of gender for certain situations (family life and intimate relationships) and a different set of explanations for other contexts (work and school life).

As you learn the theoretical approaches various people have developed in relation to gender, there's a strong possibility that some of them will sound familiar and that others will make less sense to you. This is likely because some theories match more or less closely the working theory you've already developed about how gender works. Regardless of the specific content of your own theories about gender, we all have a general sense of what gender is and how it works, and at a basic level, this is what a theory is—a set of statements and propositions that seek to explain or predict a particular aspect of social life (Newman, 2016).

Three Reasons to Learn Gender Theories

If we all already have our own theories about gender, then why is it important to learn theories that have been developed by other people? Why aren't our own personal theories good enough? There are three answers to that question. *One answer* is that although we all have our own theories about gender, we may have never had the opportunity or inclination to test those theories in a meaningful and rigorous way. You can test your individual theory of gender against your own experiences, but as we've already discussed in Chapter 1, your own experiences are likely to be very different from those of people in other parts of the world and with other identities. For example, your theory may work well at explaining why a wife in a heterosexual married couple does much of the housework, but can it help explain the division of household labor between married gay, lesbian, or transgender couples? Your theory may work for some situations in your own life but not for others.

Most of the theories we discuss in the next two chapters have been proposed by people who've had the time, opportunity, and inclination to develop their theories and to test their usefulness in a variety of ways, including conducting social research. Ideally, that research tests these theories in a variety of settings and situations, making the explanatory power of the theory that much greater. Throughout the book, you'll see these theories applied to specific situations to explain a wide variety of behaviors.

A second reason theory is important is that it helps us to test the explanatory "wings," so to speak, of our own way of understanding gender. You may have strong beliefs about your own particular theory of gender. But your ability to defend that belief depends on your being able to demonstrate why your beliefs are right and others are wrong. Learning theory forces you to seriously consider the strengths and weaknesses of your own way of thinking. This happens through gaining a thorough and workable understanding of how other theories work. Why? Because to demonstrate that another theory is wrong, you have to have a pretty good understanding of what it says and how it works. You may read about doing gender in this chapter and not at all agree with the way in which doing-gender theorists understand gender. But developing your own explanation for why doing-gender theory is wrong requires that you further develop your own way of understanding gender in response to those ideas. In other words, it's not enough to simply say someone else's explanation of gender inequality is wrong; you must be able first to demonstrate *how* they're wrong and then to demonstrate how *your* explanation is better. If you think of your own way of understanding gender as a set of wings you've constructed for yourself to navigate through life, learning other theories about gender is like putting those wings through a series of test flights to see whether they really work.

The final reason it's important to learn theories about gender has to do with our own ability to see and understand the world accurately. Can we trust our vision of the world? Is what we see true or real, and what does it mean to say something is *real*, anyway? Do the beliefs we may already have about gender influence what

we see and feel? For example, psychologists identify **confirmation bias** as our tendency to look for information that confirms our preexisting beliefs while ignoring information that contradicts those beliefs. If you believe gay men act more feminine, confirmation bias predicts that you will pay special attention to all the gay men you know or see who act more feminine while ignoring both the gay men who *don't* act feminine and the nongay men who *do* act feminine. Confirmation bias suggests that our own working theories of gender can serve as blinders, preventing us from seeing and considering certain gendered phenomena in our lives.

Learning about other theories is a way to remove those blinders through focusing our attention on aspects of gender that we might not otherwise have seen or noticed. Along these lines, many sociologists speak of using theory as a kind of lens through which to see the world. Like binoculars, magnifying lenses, microscopes, telescopes, and 3-D glasses, these different lenses provide us with different views of the world.

All three of these reasons suggest that learning theories of gender is important because these theories help us to become better thinkers in general—and especially better thinkers as related to issues of gender in our lives. So let's begin our exploration of theories of gender by looking at feminism and its influence on sociological ways of thinking about gender.

Gender in Sociology Before Feminism

Sociology, like many of the traditional academic disciplines, is perceived as being founded primarily by white, upper-class, European, presumably heterosexual men. Early sociologists, such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, are credited with developing the foundations of sociological theory as a response to the problems they perceived in their own lifetimes—problems such as industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism. But as feminists would later point out, their view of the world was inevitably shaped by their own positions as white, largely upper-class, heterosexual, European cis men. These men assumed that they were describing experiences and concepts that applied to everyone, regardless of their gender, race, class position, or sexuality; but as we will continue to discover in this book, there are problems with assuming any kind of universal experience.

Women and people of color were doing sociology alongside Weber and Durkheim, but not surprisingly given the long history of sexism and racism, their contributions were largely erased from the discipline. Max Weber's wife, Marianne Weber, was an important feminist, intellectual, and sociologist in her own right, publishing works on gender, motherhood, and marriage (Appelrouth & Edles, 2012). Jane Addams won the Noble Peace Prize for her work with poor, immigrant communities in Chicago and published many books describing her detailed research into the causes and consequences of poverty in American cities. W. E. B. DuBois, in addition to being the first Black man to earn a graduate degree from Harvard, also developed extensive theories of racial inequality and is believed to

have influenced Weber's theory of status, but only recently have some sociologists included him as one of the central founders of the discipline. Though early women sociologists like Jane Addams and Marianne Weber were including gender in their theories, their contributions were ignored and written out of the history of sociology, mostly because of their supposedly inferior status as women. The thoughts and ideas of white men were simply seen as more important and valid than those of women and people of color.

The way in which the theories of Max Weber are still remembered but his wife Marianne's are largely forgotten brings us to a consideration of how power and privilege work in society. The white, male founders were in a privileged position because of their race and their status as men. **Privilege** is a set of mostly unearned rewards and benefits that come with a given status in society. Writer Roxane Gay (2014) calls privilege a sort of peculiar benefit. As a Black, queer woman and a child of Haitian parents, Gay describes how even though she may lack certain benefits in the United States, she enjoyed many privileges relative to children in Haiti. Everyone has some privilege, and everyone lacks some privilege. The privilege W. E. B. DuBois may have had as a man was balanced against the lack of privilege he had as a Black man. Privilege, Gay and others tell us, is a complicated thing.

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Are there still ways in your society in which men's experiences are assumed to be universal? Can you think of any specific examples of this tendency? How would our thinking be different if we assumed women's experiences were universal? For example, what if giving birth to children was assumed to be a basic, universal experience?

Privilege can take the form of actual rewards, such as the privilege of knowing that as a man, you can generally make much more than most women as a professional athlete or coach. Jill Ellis, coach of the 3-time champion United States Women's National Soccer team, made $318,533 in 2018 compared to her male equivalent, Bruce Arena, who made $1.4 million during the same period even though his men's team failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup (Mertens 2019). The WNBA's (Women's National Basketball Association) most valuable player in 2016, Sylvia Fowles, earned $109,000 for all her accomplishments. In the men's NBA (National Basketball Association), Leandro Barbosa was waived by the Phoenix Suns in 2017 and was still expected to make $500,000, 5 times as much as Fowles, even though he wouldn't be playing most of the season. In golf, the U.S. Women's Open in 2015 set a record for attendance as spectators watched Gee Chun win. Chun received $810,000 as an award from the U.S. Golf Association, while Jordan Spieth, the winner of the men's Open, got $1.8 million. In most sports, men have the privilege of being able to make more than women.

Privilege is trickier to identify when it signifies the absence of barriers that exist for less privileged people. If two white, upper-class women were to sit at a table at Starbucks without ordering anything, chances are that no one would call the police to have them removed. Yet when two Black men in Philadelphia did the same thing as they waited for a business meeting, the police were called and the two men were arrested (Pomrenze & Simon, 2018). Being able to appear in public

places without having the police called to arrest you is an example of a barrier that is not faced by those in a privileged status to the same degree as it is by less privileged people in society. This kind of privilege has been described as functioning like the wind at your back if you're peddling a bicycle (Wimsatt, 2001). Privilege, like the wind, makes moving through the world that much easier, and you might assume you're moving so quickly because of your own effort—your pedaling. You probably won't realize how helpful the wind at your back was until you find yourself having to bike *into* the wind. It's difficult to realize what that's like until you've had to do it yourself—or maybe until you've talked to someone else who has had to do it.

Where does that leave us with the men in the field of sociology and their lack of concern about gender? Being mostly white, upper-class men allowed these sociologists to bike with the wind, and as far as they knew, everyone else was doing the same thing. Gender didn't seem important to them in part because its effect on their lives, although still important, was also less visible. This is, in fact, another form of privilege. Part of the benefit of being in a privileged status is that you don't have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. Theorists like DuBois and Addams wrote about gender and race because they didn't have the privilege of ignoring its impact on their lives. Do people who live in places with reliable access to electricity and clean water think about how lucky they are to be living in a place with those benefits? Do people in the United States consider how convenient it is that people around the world know much more about American culture than the average American knows about other cultures? Probably not. Being American or from a place where these things are taken for granted is a privilege, and most people don't spend large chunks of their days thinking about the privileges they *have*.

White, straight, male sociologists were privileged by their gender, and that meant they didn't have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. This is one small part of the reason why those male sociologists did not seriously consider gender (or race or sexuality) and an important lesson in the blinding properties of privilege. Privilege, in fact, is one of the reasons we need to be cautious in trusting the reality and objectivity of our own views about gender, and it is therefore another reason learning gender theories can be useful.

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What are other examples of statuses that come with privilege? Can you think of specific barriers that don't exist for people with those privileges? How does having privilege affect the way you see and understand the world?

Feminist Theories and Their Influence on Sociological Thinking About Gender

Across history, cultures, and civilizations, when women have asserted their power and asked for equality, it has almost always been perceived as dangerous. It is important to remember that the various versions of feminism we discuss are just

one manifestation of a long, global history of questioning the gender status quo and advocating the rights of women. Women in Kenya organized to fight the effects of colonial governments on their livelihood in 1948, and women in India were involved in working for their own rights along with their country's independence long before it was achieved in 1947 (Basu, 1995). Neither of these groups of women would have described themselves as feminists, though. Feminism in all its many forms assumes certain models of what it means to be a woman, what the goals of women should be relative to their status, and how to go about achieving those goals. But the feminist model, although it continues to expand and adapt to fit the diverse needs of women and men across the world, is, like sociology, a product of Anglo-European thought.

Globally, women define their own interests and goals differently, and they sometimes perceive feminism as another attempt by the global North to make the rest of the world into their own image (Basu, 1995). Given this history, we should remember that those particular ideologies we label as feminism do not describe the totality of how women think about or organize in their own interests globally, as we explore throughout this book. For now, because we're focusing on the relationship between feminism and sociological thought, we'll be talking about feminism and women's movements as they developed mainly in the Anglo-European world.

In the 21st century, calling yourself a feminist is less stigmatized than it was in the past, as pop icons like Beyoncé and Taylor Swift now label themselves feminists. A 2016 poll found that 6 in 10 women and one third of men identified themselves as feminists or strong feminist. Among women ages 18 to 34, 63% identified as strong feminist or feminist. These numbers suggest that feminism is increasingly popular among younger generations. But negative stereotypes about feminism persist. In the same poll, 46% of people believed feminism blames men for women's challenges (Cai & Clement, 2016).

Regardless of attitudes toward the label, feminism is integral to any discussion of gender and especially to a sociological exploration of gender. So what exactly is feminism, and why is it seen as so dangerous around the world?

The First Wave of the Feminist Movement

Feminists generally divide their discussion of feminism as a social movement into three periods, though it's important to keep in mind that the reality on the ground is much more complicated. Women active during the first wave lived long enough to be part of the second wave as well. The lines we draw between one wave and the next can be arbitrary but are helpful as a framework for understanding feminism historically.

The first wave of feminism coincided with suffrage movements in both Europe and the United States (Taylor, Whittier, & Pelak, 2004). This is different from the history of women's movements in most of the global South simply because nearly all the men and women in these nations were deprived of the right to vote or govern themselves by colonial powers. Women's suffrage, when it came, was

often connected to suffrage for native peoples more generally. This first phase in the women's movement in the Anglo-European world is specific to the historical context of existing democracies in which male (and, in the United States, *white* male) citizens had long ago achieved the right to vote.

The early suffragettes were a diverse group in both their backgrounds and their goals, but many of their efforts focused primarily on enfranchisement, or getting women the right to vote. For some women in the movement, this was because they wished to pursue social reform goals that were not necessarily connected to gender, such as the legal prohibition of alcohol. These women saw getting the vote as the first step in this larger project. Other women of the first wave had more radical goals, including sexual freedom and expanding the roles of middle-class women in the workplace.

Gaining an expanded role for women in the workforce was an important goal for white, middle-class women, who largely did *not* do paid work outside the home. Suffragettes such as Sojourner Truth, a former slave who served as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, drew attention to the differing experiences among women of the first wave. As a former slave, Sojourner Truth never had the luxury of *not* working, and the kind of work she did was considered "men's work" by many of the white suffragettes—although she was certainly never paid for it. As would be the case throughout the history of the feminist movement, the way women were positioned in society often led to a different outlook on what the main problems faced by women in society were and how to go about fixing those problems. Regardless of these differences, the first-wave movement was successful in gaining the right to vote for women in 1920 in the United States (and in 1928 in England, but not until 1944 in France).

The Second Wave of the Feminist Movement

When most people in the 21st century think of feminism, their frame of reference is the second wave of the feminist movement that began in the 1960s in the global North. This movement was part of a larger, global social movement cycle that included independence movements in the developing world as well as the civil rights movement in the United States. There were many interconnections among these different movements. For example, some women who got their initial social movement experience within the civil rights movement in the United States moved on to the women's movement. In the developing world, women worked within nationalist movements to throw off colonial rule and establish democracies. Although they often included women's rights within those larger agendas, these movements were necessarily different because of the historical context of the postcolonial world.

The second wave of feminism, like the first wave, was characterized by diversity in the types of women involved and in the articulation of their goals. To understand this second wave of feminism is to understand that, as with all social movements, there was no one movement, no one group, and often no

single, unanimously agreed upon agenda. Organizations such as NOW (the National Organization for Women) focused on passing legislation in the United States that would have institutionalized the prevention of gender discrimination. One way they tried to accomplish this goal was through passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

Consciousness-raising also became an important part of the movement as feminists focused on finding connections between their personal lives and the politics of gender. For many feminists, the development of their theories of gender were inextricably grounded in an examination of their personal lives, and this work was just as important, if not more important, than changing institutions such as the government. Charlotte Bunch epitomized this connection when she wrote in 1968, "There is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and no political issue that is not ultimately personal. The old barriers have fallen" (Bordo, 2003). From these examinations of the connections between the personal and the political came a focus on issues such as women's rights in the workplace (including the right to be free from sexual harassment), domestic violence, reproductive rights, and sexual violence.

The Third Wave of the Feminist Movement

Third-wave feminism was in many ways a response to the contradictions of second-wave feminism. Emerging during the 1980s and 1990s, third-wave feminism encompassed a diverse range of theories and orientations among both academics and activists. The voices of women of color, who were a strong influence in all three waves of the feminist movement, were strongest in the development of third-wave feminism. Women such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Aurora Levins Morales, and Rebecca Walker questioned essentialist tendencies in feminism, or the tendency to assume some universal experience of being a woman. They fought to organize around issues of race, sexual orientation, and social class in addition to gender.

In her collection of third-wave essays, *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, Rebecca Walker (1995) attempted to articulate a way to be feminist that offered room enough to include both men and women; whites and people of color; lesbians, gays, and straight people; supermodels like Veronica Webb; and second-wave feminists such as Gloria Steinem. Third-wave feminism was influenced by postmodernism, postcolonialism, the work of Michel Foucault, and, eventually, queer theory.

The third wave is characterized in many ways by coming to terms with and being up front about the many contradictions that always lay beneath the surface of feminism as it developed. For example, postcolonialism influenced feminism in the third wave by drawing attention to the ways in which women had ignored the experiences of women outside the Anglo-European world. This examination raised questions about whether women could claim one global movement or whether the

interests and goals of women in the global North and global South were so different and opposed as to make any umbrella movement impossible. Third-wave feminism, rather than ignoring or suppressing these types of questions, embraced them as crucial to the next phase of achieving gender equality.

The Fourth Wave of the Feminist Movement

Are we currently living in a fourth wave of the feminist movement? If we are, what's the difference between this latest feminist movement and those of the past? Scholars have been heralding a fourth wave since as far back as 1986. But more recently a series of events and activism have converged into a critical mass of activism. The Women's March in 2016 on the day after Donald Trump's inauguration became the largest single-day protest in U.S. history. Estimates suggest that between 3 and 5 million people participated in all sister marches across the United States that day and that a total of 7 million people marched worldwide in 81 other countries (Hortocollis & Alcindor, 2017; Women's March, 2016). In the 2018 midterm elections in the United States, a record-setting number of women ran for political office (and won). Also in 2018, the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment of women in the workplace swept across social media. That use of the hashtag was not the first iteration of the movement, which was first used by Black activist Tarana Burke (Olheiser, 2017). The hashtag, along with the cascade of women going public with their stories of harassment by famous and powerful men ranging from Harvey Weinstein to Garrison Keillor to Al Franken, resulted in the formation of Time's Up, an organization to systematically combat sexual harassment (Gonzalez, France, & Melas, 2018). All of these events suggest we're living in the middle of a fourth wave.

In attempting to characterize this fourth wave, Feministing blog founder Jessica Valenti said in 2009 that perhaps one of its defining qualities was that it was online (Grady, 2018). As with other 21st-century social movements like the Arab Spring, fourth-wave feminists meet and plan their activism online. The #MeToo movement began as a hashtag on Twitter. Much of the organizing that went into the Women's March took place online as well. For that reason, some have dated the beginning of the fourth wave to 2008, when social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were firmly entrenched in society and popular feminist blogs like Jezebel and Feministing spread across the web. As with other waves of feminism, the fourth wave is diverse and often contradictory. Still, in addition to being digitally driven, fourth-wave feminism is characterized by its queerness, its trans inclusiveness, and its body positivity (Grady, 2018).

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What evidence do you see for a fourth wave of feminism in your own life or online? What seem to be the goals of this social movement? Who are the people involved in the fourth wave?

He for She: Men and Feminism

At this point you might ask yourself, *Where do men fit into all of this?* Are conversations about feminism compatible with conversations about men, and if so, how? You might be concerned, given the considerable amount of time we've just spent talking about feminism and the assumptions many people have about feminism (that feminists are angry or hate men), that this book is going to be all about how much men suck.

Let's start with the first question: Where were men during these various waves of the feminist movement? The answer is complicated. Some men *were* involved in various places and times in women's movements. In the first-wave feminist movement in the United States, men such as abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Henry Ward Beecher (father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) were involved in working for women's suffrage along with the abolition of slavery. Many 19th-century activists saw these issues as deeply connected, although the two issues also sometimes led to divisions within the movement. The National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) emerged with the second wave of the women's movement in the 1970s and focuses on issues such as child custody and ending men's violence (NOMAS, n.d.). Globally, men and women have often worked side by side in movements for national liberation and establishing democracy. In Kenya, women fought alongside men in the Mau war of 1952 for Kenya's independence from colonial control. In the most recent fourth wave, many men have come forward to claim the feminist label, and the United Nations is actively engaged in a campaign to involve men in the quest for gender equality, a movement labeled He for She. Women involved in social movements often argue that the accomplishment of their goals would benefit both men and women in society, as we will see later. Although this may be true, most people involved in women's movements are often still women.

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What are some concrete ways in which feminism could benefit men?

Are conversations about feminism compatible with conversations about men? The answer to this second question is a definite yes. As mentioned, feminists argue in various forms that a society with more gender equality is a society that's good for everyone, women and men. Although in the United States the second wave of the feminist movement was often referred to as *women's liberation*, many women felt that the movement would liberate men as well. What did men need to be liberated from? As we will see throughout this book, although gender as a social system often privileges men, it does not *always* do so, and when it does provide privileges, they often come with a price. Our culture demands that both men and women conform to gender and sexual norms, and men's access to power and privilege is conditional on their conformity to these norms. Part of the goal of feminists is to loosen these restrictions for everyone.

Feminists have always been subject to accusations of disliking men. But as you should begin to see, feminism is not about positioning men against women in some kind of epic battle for power and control of the universe, although that might make