

THE Kaleidoscope OF Gender

Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities

4th
edition

Joan Z. Spade • Catherine G. Valentine



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PREFACE

This fourth edition of *The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities* provides an overview of the cutting-edge literature and theoretical frameworks in the sociology of gender and related fields for understanding the social construction of gender. Although not ignoring classical contributions to gender research, this book focuses on where the field is moving and the changing paradigms and approaches to gender studies. *The Kaleidoscope of Gender* uses the metaphor of a kaleidoscope and three themes—prisms, patterns, and possibilities—to unify topic areas. It focuses on the prisms through which gender is shaped, the patterns gender takes, and the possibilities for social change through a deeper understanding of ourselves and our relationships with others, both locally and globally.

The book begins, in the first part, by looking at gender and other social prisms that define gendered experiences across the spectrum of daily lives. We conceptualize prisms as social categories of difference and inequality that shape the way gender is defined and practiced, including culture, race/ethnicity, social class, sexuality, age, and ability/disability. Different as individuals' lives might be, there are patterns to gendered experiences. The second part of the book follows this premise and examines these patterns across a multitude of arenas of daily life. From here, the last part of the book takes a proactive stance, exploring possibilities for change. Basic to the view of gender as a social construction is the potential for social change. Students will learn that gender transformation has occurred and can occur

and, consequently, that it is possible to alter the genderscape. Because prisms, patterns, and possibilities themselves intersect, the framework for this book is fluid, interweaving topics and emphasizing the complexity and ever-changing nature of gender.

We had multiple goals in mind as we first developed this book, and the fourth edition reaffirms these goals:

1. Creating a book of readings that is accessible, timely, and stimulating in a text whose structure and content incorporate a fluid framework, with gender presented as an emergent, evolving, complex pattern—not one fixed in traditional categories and topics
2. Selecting articles that creatively and clearly explicate what gender is and is not and what it means to say that gender is socially constructed by incorporating provocative illustrations and solid scientific evidence of the malleability of gender and the role of individuals, groups, and social institutions in the daily performance and transformation of gender practices and patterns
3. Including readings that untangle and clarify the intricate ways gender is embedded in and defined by the prisms of culture, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, ability/disability, and cultural patterns of identities, groups, and institutions
4. Integrating articles with cross-cultural and global foci to illustrate that gender is a continuum of categories, patterns, and expressions whose relevance is contextual and continuously shifting, and that gender inequality is not a universal and natural social pattern but, rather, one of many systems of oppression

5. Assembling articles that offer students useful cognitive and emotional tools for making sense of the shifting and contradictory genderscape they inhabit, its personal relevance, its implications for relationships both locally and globally, and possibilities for change

These goals shaped the revisions in the fourth edition of *The Kaleidoscope of Gender*. New selections in this edition emphasize global and intersectional analyses throughout the book. More readings focus on masculinities, and the final chapter highlights new contemporary social movements for gender justice. We continue to explore the role of institutions in maintaining gender difference and inequality. Across the chapters, readings examine the individual, situational, and organizational bases for gendered patterns in relationships, behaviors, and beliefs. Additionally, many readings illustrate how multiple prisms of difference and inequality, such as race and social class, create an array of patterns of gender—distinct but sometimes similar to the idealized patterns in a culture.

As in the third edition, reading selections include theoretical and review articles; however, the emphasis continues to be on contemporary contributions to the field. A significantly revised introduction to the book provides more extensive and detailed descriptions of the theories in the field, particularly theories based on a social-constructionist perspective. In addition, the introduction to the book develops the kaleidoscope metaphor as a tool for viewing gender and a guide for studying gender. Revised chapter introductions contextualize the literature in each part of the book, introduce the readings, and illustrate how they relate to analyses of gender. Introductions and questions for consideration precede each reading to help students focus on and grasp the key points of the selections. Additionally, each chapter ends with questions for students to consider and topics for students to explore.

It is possible to use this book alone, as a supplement to a text, or in combination with other articles or monographs. It is designed for undergraduate audiences, and the readings are appropriate for a variety of courses focusing on the study of gender, such as sociology of gender, gender and social change, and women's studies. The book may be used in departments of sociology, anthropology, psychology, and women's studies.

We would like to thank those reviewers whose valuable suggestions and comments helped us develop the book throughout four editions, including the following.

Fourth edition reviewers:

Nancy Ashton, Lafayette College; John Bartkowski, University of Texas at San Antonio; Beth Berila, St Cloud State University, Women's Studies Program; Ted Cohen, Ohio Wesleyan University; Francoise Cromer, Stony Brook University; Pamela J. Forman, University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire; Ann Fuehrer, Miami University; Katja Guenther, University of California, Riverside; William Hewitt, West Chester University of PA; Bianca Isaki, University of Hawai'i at Manoa; Kristin J. Jacobson, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey; Brian Kassar, Montana State University; Julia Mason, Grand Valley State University; Janice McCabe, Florida State University; Kristen McHenry, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth; Elizabeth Markovits, Mount Holyoke College; Jennifer Pearson, Wichita State University; Sara Skiles-duToit, University of Texas, Arlington; Mary Nell Trautner, University of Buffalo, SUNY; Julianne Weinzimmer, Wright State University; and Lori Wiebold, Bradley University.

Third edition reviewers:

ChaeRan Freeze, Brandeis University; Patti Giuffre, Texas State University; Linda Grant, University of Georgia; Todd Migliaccio, California State University, Sacramento; J. Michael Ryan, University of Maryland, College Park; and Diane Kholos Wysocki, University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Second edition reviewers:

Patti Giuffre, Texas State University, San Marcos; Linda Grant, University of Georgia; Minjeong Kim, University at Albany, SUNY; Laura Kramer, Montclair State University; Heather Laube, University of Michigan, Flint; Todd Migliaccio, California State University, Sacramento; Kristen Myers, Northern Illinois University; Wendy Simonds, Georgia State University; Debbie Storrs, University of Idaho; and Elroi Waszkiewicz, Georgia State University.

Finally, we would like to thank students in our sociology of gender courses for challenging us to think about new ways to teach our courses and making us aware of arenas of gender that are not typically the focus of gender studies books.

INTRODUCTION

This book is an invitation to you, the reader, to enter the fascinating and challenging world of gender studies. Gender is briefly defined as the meanings, practices, and relations of femininities and masculinities that people create as we go about our daily lives in different social settings. Although we discuss gender throughout this book, it is a very complex term to understand and the reality of gender goes far beyond this simple definition. While a more detailed discussion of what gender is and how it is related to biological maleness and femaleness is provided in Chapter 1, we find the metaphor of a kaleidoscope useful in thinking about the complexity of the meaning of gender from a sociological viewpoint.

THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF GENDER

A real kaleidoscope is a tube containing an arrangement of mirrors or prisms that produces different images and patterns. When you look through the eyepiece of a kaleidoscope, light is typically reflected by the mirrors or prisms through cells containing objects such as glass pieces, seashells, and the like to create ever-changing patterns of design and color (Baker, 1999). In this book, we use the kaleidoscope metaphor to help us grasp the complex and dynamic meaning and practice of gender as it interacts with other social prisms—such as race,

ethnicity, age, sexuality, and social class—to create complex patterns of identities and relationships. Three themes then emerge from the metaphor of the kaleidoscope: prisms, patterns, and possibilities.

Part I of the book focuses on prisms. A prism in a kaleidoscope is an arrangement of mirrors that refracts or disperses light into a spectrum of patterns (Baker, 1999). We use the term *social prism* to refer to socially constructed categories of difference and inequality through which our lives are reflected or shaped into patterns of daily experiences. In addition to gender, when we discuss social prisms, we consider other socially constructed categories such as race, ethnicity, age, physical ability/disability, social class, and sexuality. Culture is also conceptualized as a social prism in this book, as we examine how gender is shaped across groups and societies. The concept of social prisms helps us understand that gender is not a universal or static entity but, rather, is continuously created within the parameters of individual and group life. Looking at the interactions of the prism of gender with other social prisms helps us see the bigger picture—gender practices and meanings are a montage of intertwined social divisions and connections that both pull us apart and bring us together.

Part II of the book examines the patterns of gendered expressions and experiences created by the interaction of multiple prisms of difference and inequality. Patterns are regularized,

prepackaged ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in society, and gendered patterns are present in almost all aspects of daily life. In the United States, examples of gendered patterns include the association of the color pink with girls and blue with boys (Paoletti, 2012). However, these patterns of gender are experienced and expressed in different ways depending on the other social prisms that shape our identities and life chances. Furthermore, these patterns are not static, as Paoletti illustrates. Before the 1900s, children were dressed similarly until around the age of 7, with boys just as likely as girls to wear pink—but both more likely to be dressed in white. In addition, dresses were once considered appropriate for both genders in Europe and America. It wasn't until decades later, in the 1980s, that color became rigidly gendered in children's clothing, in the pink-and-blue schema. You will find that gendered patterns restrict choices, even the colors we wear—often without our even recognizing it is happening.

Another example of a gendered pattern is the disproportionate numbers of female nurses and male engineers (see Table 7.1 in this book). If you take a closer look at engineers and nurses (as discussed in Chapter 7), you will note that engineers are predominately White men and nurses White women. Consequently, the patterns of gender are a result of the complex interaction of multiple social prisms across time and space.

Part III of the book concerns possibilities for gender change. Just as the wonder of the kaleidoscope lies in the ever-evolving patterns it creates, gendered patterns are always in flux. Each life and the world we live in can be understood as a kaleidoscope of unfolding growth and continual change (Baker, 1999). This dynamic aspect of the kaleidoscope metaphor represents the opportunity we have, individually and collectively, to transform gendered patterns that can be harmful to women and men. Although the theme of gender change is prominent throughout this book, it is addressed specifically in Chapter 10 and in the Epilogue.

One caveat must be presented before we take you through the kaleidoscope of gender. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word

ordinarily used to refer to one thing is applied to better understand another thing. A metaphor should not be taken literally. It does not directly represent reality. We use the metaphor of the kaleidoscope as an analytical tool to aid us in grasping the complexity, ambiguity, and fluidity of gender. However, unlike the prisms in a real kaleidoscope, the meaning and experience of social prisms (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, and culture) are socially constructed and change in response to patterns in the larger society. Thus, although the prisms of a real kaleidoscope are static, the prisms of the gender kaleidoscope are shaped by the patterns of society.

As you step into the world of gender studies, you'll need to develop a capacity to see what is hidden by the cultural blinders we all wear at least some of the time. This capacity to see into the complexities of human relationships and group life has been called sociological imagination or, to be hip, "sociological radar." It is a capacity that is finely honed by practice and training both inside and outside the classroom. A sociological perspective enables us to see through the cultural smokescreens that conceal the patterns, meanings, and dynamics of our relationships.

GENDER STEREOTYPES

The sociological perspective will help you think about gender in ways you might never have considered. It will, for example, help you debunk *gender stereotypes*, which are rigid, oversimplified, exaggerated beliefs about femininity and masculinity that misrepresent most women and men (Walters, 1999). To illustrate, let's analyze one gender stereotype that many people in American society believe—women talk more than men (Anderson & Leaper, 1998; Swaminathan, 2007; Wood, 1999).

Social scientific research is helpful in documenting whether women actually talk more than men, or whether this belief is just another gender stereotype. To arrive at a conclusion, social scientists study the interactions of men and women in

an array of settings and count how often men speak compared with women. They almost always find that, on average, men talk more in mixed-gender groups (Brescoli, 2011; Wood, 1999). Researchers also find that men interrupt more and tend to ignore topics brought up by women (Anderson & Leaper, 1998; Wood, 1999). In and of themselves, these are important findings—the stereotype turns reality on its head.

So why does the stereotype continue to exist? First, we might ask how people believe something to be real—such as the stereotype that women talk more than men—when, in general, it isn't true. Part of the answer lies in the fact that culture, defined as the way of life of a group of people, shapes what we experience as reality (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion). As Allan Johnson (1997) aptly puts it, "Living in a culture is somewhat like participating in the magician's magic because all the while we think we're paying attention to what's 'really' happening, alternative realities unfold without even occurring to us" (p. 55).

In other words, we don't usually reflect on our own culture; we are mystified by it without much awareness of its bewildering effect on us. The power of beliefs, including gender beliefs, is quite awesome. Gender stereotypes shape our perceptions, and these beliefs shape our reality.

A second question we need to ask about gender stereotypes is: What is their purpose? For example, do they set men against women and contribute to the persistence of a system of inequality that disadvantages women and advantages men? Certainly, the stereotype that many Americans hold of women as nonstop talkers is not a positive one. The stereotype does not assume that women are assertive, articulate, or captivating speakers. Instead, it tends to depict women's talk as trivial gossip or irritating nagging. In other words, the stereotype devalues women's talk while, at the same time, elevating men's talk as thoughtful and worthy of our attention. One of the consequences of this stereotype is that both men and women take men's talk more seriously (Brescoli, 2011; Wood, 1999). This pattern is reflected in the fact that the voice

of authority in many areas of American culture, such as television and politics, is almost always a male voice (Brescoli, 2011). The message communicated is clear—women are less important than men. In other words, gender stereotypes help legitimize status and power differences between men and women (Brescoli, 2011).

However, stereotypical images of men and women are not universal in their application, because they are complicated by the kaleidoscopic nature of people's lives. Prisms, or social categories, such as race/ethnicity, social class, and age, intersect with gender to produce stereotypes that differ in symbolic meaning and functioning. For example, the prisms of gender, race, and age interact for African American and Hispanic men, who are stereotyped as dangerous (as noted in Adia Harvey Wingfield's reading in Chapter 7). These variations in gender stereotypes act as controlling images that maintain complex systems of domination and subordination in which some individuals and groups are dehumanized and disadvantaged in relationship to others (see Bonnie Thornton Dill and Marla H. Kohlman's article and other readings in Chapter 2).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF GENDER

Just a few decades ago, social scientists assumed that gender encompassed two discrete categories described as sex roles—masculine/men and feminine/women. These sex roles were conceptualized in a biological "essentialist" framework to be either an automatic response to innate personality characteristics and/or biological sex characteristics such as hormones and reproductive functions (Kimmel, 2004; Tavris, 1992) or a mix of biological imperatives and learning reinforced by social pressure to conform to one or the other sex role (Connell, 2010). For example, women were thought to be naturally more nurturing because of their capacity to bear children, and men were seen as prewired to take on leadership positions in major societal institutions such as family, politics, and business. This "sex roles"

model of women and men was one-dimensional, relatively static, and ethnocentric, and it is *not* supported by biological, psychological, sociological, or anthropological research.

The concept of gender developed as social scientists conducted research that questioned the simplicity and accuracy of the “sex roles” perspective. One example of this research is that social scientists have debunked the notion that biological sex characteristics cause differences in men’s and women’s behaviors (Tavris, 1992). Research on hormones illustrates this point. Testosterone, which women as well as men produce, does not cause aggression in men (see Robert M. Sapolsky’s reading in Chapter 1), and the menstrual cycle does not cause women to be more “emotional” than men (Tavris, 1992; see Aaronette M. White and Tal Peretz’s reading in Chapter 6).

Another example is that social scientific research demonstrated that men and women are far more physically, cognitively, and emotionally alike than different. What were assumed to be natural differences and inequalities between women and men were clearly shown to be the consequence of the asymmetrical and unequal life experiences, resources, and power of women compared with men (Connell, 2010; Tavris, 1992). Consider the arena of athletics. It is a common and long-held belief that biological sex is related to physical ability and, in particular, that women are athletically inferior to men. These beliefs have been challenged by the outcomes of a recent series of legal interventions that opened the world of competitive sports to girls and women. Once legislation such as Title IX was implemented in 1972, the expectation that women could not be athletes began to change as girls and young women received the same training and support for athletic pursuits as did men. Not surprisingly, the gap in physical strength and skills between women and men decreased dramatically. Today, women athletes regularly break records and perform physical feats thought impossible for women just a few decades ago.

Yet another example of how the “sex roles” model was discredited was the documentation

of inequality as a human-created social system. Social scientists highlighted the social origins of patterns of gender inequality within the economy, family, religion, and other social institutions that benefit men as a group and maintain patriarchy as a social structure. To illustrate, in the 1970s, when researchers began studying gender inequality, they found that women made between 60 and 70 cents for every dollar men made. Things are not much better today. In 2010, the median salary for women was 81.8% of men’s median salary (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

The intellectual weaknesses of “sex roles” theory (Connell, 2010), buttressed by considerable contradictory evidence, led social scientists to more sophisticated theories and modes of studying gender that could address the complexities and malleability of sex (femaleness and maleness) and gender (femininities and masculinities). In short, social science documented the fact that we are made and make ourselves into gendered people through social interaction in everyday life (Connell, 2010). It is not natural or normal to be a feminine woman or a masculine man. Gender is a socially constructed system of social relations that can be understood only by studying the social processes by which gender is defined into existence and maintained or changed by human actions and interactions (Schwalbe, 2001). This theory of gender social construction will be discussed throughout the book.

One of the most important sources of evidence in support of the idea that gender is socially constructed is derived from cross-cultural and historical studies as described in the earlier discussion of the gendering of pink and blue. The variations and fluidity in the definitions and expressions of gender across cultures and over time illustrate that the American gender system is not universal. For example, people in some cultures have created more than two genders (see Serena Nanda’s reading in Chapter 1). Other cultures define men and women as similar, not different (see Christine Helliwell’s reading in Chapter 3). Still others view gender as flowing and changing across the life span (Herdt, 1997).

As social scientists examined gender patterns through the prism of culture and throughout history, their research challenged the notion that masculinity and femininity are defined and experienced in the same way by all people. For example, the meaning and practice of femininity in orthodox, American religious subcultures is not the same as femininity outside those communities (Rose, 2001). The differences are expressed in a variety of ways, including women's clothing. Typically, orthodox religious women adhere to modesty rules in dress, covering their heads, arms, and legs.

Elaborating on the idea of multiple or plural masculinities and femininities, Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell coined the terms *hegemonic masculinity* and *emphasized femininity* to understand the relations between and among masculinities and femininities in patriarchal societies. Patriarchal societies are dominated by privileged men (e.g., upper-class White men), but they also typically benefit less privileged men in their relationships with women. According to Connell (1987), hegemonic masculinity is the idealized pattern of masculinity in patriarchal societies, while emphasized femininity is the vision of femininity held up as the model of womanhood in those societies. In Connell's definition, hegemonic masculinity is "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Key features of hegemonic masculinity include the subordination of women, the exclusion and debasement of gay men, and the celebration of toughness and competitiveness (Connell, 2000). However, hegemony does not mean violence per se. It refers to "ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Emphasized femininity, in contrast, is about women's subordination, with its key features being sociability, compliance with men's sexual and ego desires, and acceptance of marriage and child care (Connell, 1987). Both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity patterns are "embedded in specific social

environments" and are, therefore, dynamic as opposed to fixed (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846).

According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are not necessarily the most common gender patterns. They are, however, the versions of manhood and womanhood against which other patterns of masculinity and femininity are measured and found wanting (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2004). For example, hegemonic masculinity produces marginalized masculinities, which, according to Connell (2000), are characteristic of exploited groups such as racial and ethnic minorities. These marginalized forms of masculinity may share features with hegemonic masculinity, such as "toughness," but are socially debased (see Wingfield's reading in Chapter 7).

In patriarchal societies, the culturally idealized form of femininity, emphasized femininity, is produced in relation to male dominance. Emphasized femininity insists on compliance, nurturance, and empathy as ideals of womanhood to which all women should subscribe (Connell, 1987). Connell does not use the term *hegemonic* to refer to emphasized femininity, because, she argues, emphasized femininity is always subordinated to masculinity. James Messerschmidt (2012) adds to our understanding of femininities by arguing that the construction of hegemonic masculinity requires some kind of "buy-in" from women and that, under certain circumstances and in certain contexts, there are women who create emphasized femininities. By doing so, they contribute to the perpetuation of coercive gender relations and identities. Think of circumstances and situations—such as within work, romantic, or family settings—when women are complicit in maintaining oppressive gender relations and identities. Why would some women participate in the production of masculinities and femininities that are oppressive? The reading by Karen D. Pyke and Denise L. Johnson in Chapter 2 is helpful in answering these questions, employing the term *hegemonic femininity* rather than *emphasized femininity*. They describe the lives of young, second-generation Asian women

and their attempts to balance two cultural patterns of gender in which White femininity, they argue, is hegemonic, or the dominant form of femininity.

Another major source of gender complexity is the interaction of gender with other social categories of difference and inequality. Allan Johnson (2001) points out,

Categories that define privilege exist all at once and in relation to one another. People never see me solely in terms of my race, for example, or my gender. Like everyone else's, my place in the social world is a package deal—white, male, heterosexual, middle-aged, married . . .—and that's the way it is all the time. . . . It makes no sense to talk about the effect of being in one of these categories—say, white—without also looking at the others and how they're related to it. (p. 53)

Seeing gender through multiple social prisms is critical, but it is not a simple task, as you will discover in the readings throughout this book. Social scientists commonly refer to this type of analysis as intersectionality, but other terms are used as well (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of this). We need to be aware of how other social prisms alter life experiences and chances. For example, although an upper-class African American woman is privileged by her social class category, she will face obstacles related to her race and gender. Or consider the situation of a middle-class White man who is gay; he might lose some of the privilege attached to his class and race because of his sexual orientation.

Finally, gender is now considered a social construct shaped at individual, interactional, and institutional levels. If we focus on only one of these levels, we provide only a partial explanation of how gender operates in our lives. This idea of gender being shaped at these three different levels is elaborated in Barbara J. Risman's article in Chapter 1 and throughout the book. Consider these three different ways of approaching gender and how they interact or influence one another. At the *individual* level, sociologists study the social categories and stereotypes we use to identify ourselves and label others (see Chapter 4). At the

interactional level, sociologists study gender as an ongoing activity carried out in interaction with other people, and how people vary their gender presentations as they move from situation to situation (see Betsy Lucal's reading in Chapter 1). At the *institutional* level, sociologists study how "gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life," such as religion, health care, language, and so forth (Acker, 1992, p. 567; see also Joan Acker's reading in Chapter 7).

THEORETICAL APPROACHES FOR UNDERSTANDING GENDER

Historically, conflict and functionalist theories explained gender at a macro level of analysis, with these theories having gone through many transformations since first proposed around the turn of the 20th century. Scholars at that time were trying to sort out massive changes in society resulting from the industrial and democratic revolutions. However, a range of theories—for example, feminist, postmodernist, and queer theories—provide more nuanced explanations of gender. Many of these more recent theories frame their understanding of gender in the lived experiences of individuals, what sociologists call microlevel theories, rather than focusing solely on a macrolevel analysis of society, wherein gender does not vary in form or function across groups or contexts.

Functionalism

Functionalism attempts to understand how all parts of a society (e.g., institutions such as family, education, economy, and the polity or state) fit together to form a smoothly running social system. According to this theoretical paradigm, parts of society tend to complement each other to create social stability (Durkheim, 1933). Translated into separate sex role relationships, Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales (1955), writing after World War II, saw distinct and separate

gender roles in the heterosexual nuclear family as a functional adaptation to a modern, complex society. Women were thought to be more “functional” if they were socialized and aspired to raise children. And men were thought to be more “functional” if they were socialized and aspired to support their children and wives. However, as Michael Kimmel (2004) notes, this “sex-based division of labor is functionally anachronistic,” and if there ever was any biological basis for specific tasks being assigned to men or women, it has been eroded (p. 55).

The functionalist viewpoint has largely been discredited in the social sciences, although it persists as part of common culture in various discourses and ideologies, especially conservative religious and political thought. It is also replicated in the realms of neuroscience and evolutionary psychology. In brief, the former tries to explain gender inequality by searching for neurological differences in human females and males assumed to be caused by hormonally induced differences in the brain. The hypothesized behavioral outcomes, according to neuroscientists such as Simon Baron-Cohen (2003), are emotionally tuned in, verbal women in contrast to men who are inclined to superior performance in areas such as math and music (Bouton, 2010). The latter, evolutionary psychology, focuses on “sex differences” (e.g., high-risk-taking male behaviors) between human females and males that are hypothesized to have their origins in psychological adaptations to early human, intrasexual competition. Both approaches, which assume there are essential differences between males and females embedded in their bodies or psyches, have been roundly critiqued by researchers (e.g., Fine, 2010) who uncovered a range of problems, including research design flaws, no significant differences between female and male subjects, overgeneralization of findings, and ethnocentrism.

Conflict Theories

Karl Marx and later conflict theorists, however, did not see social systems as functional or

benign. Instead, Marx and his colleague Friedrich Engels described industrial societies as systems of oppression in which one group, the dominant social class, uses its control of economic resources to oppress the working class. The economic resources of those in control are obtained through profits gained from exploiting the labor of subordinate groups. Marx and Engels predicted that the tension between the “haves” and the “have-nots” would result in an underlying conflict between these two groups. Most early Marxist theories focused on class oppression; however, Engels (1942/1970) wrote an important essay on the oppression of women as the earliest example of oppression of one group by another. Marx and Engels inspired socialist feminists, discussed later in this introduction under “Feminist Theories.”

Current theorists, while recognizing Marx and Engels’s recognition of the exploitation of workers in capitalist economies, criticize early conflict theory for ignoring women’s reproductive labor and unpaid work (Federici, 2012). They focus on the exploitation of women by global capitalism (see articles by Bandana Purkayastha in Chapter 2 and Jie Yang in Chapter 5). Conflict theories today call for social action relating to the oppression of women and other marginalized groups, particularly within this global framework.

Social Constructionist Theories

Social constructionist theories offer a strong antidote to biological essentialism and psychological reductionism in understanding the social worlds (e.g., institutions, ideologies, identities) constructed by people. This theory, as discussed earlier, emphasizes the social or collective processes by which people actively shape reality (e.g., ideas, inequalities, social movements) as we go about daily life in different contexts and situations. The underpinnings of social constructionist theory are in sociological thought (e.g., symbolic interactionism, dramaturgy, and ethnomethodology), as well as in anthropology, social psychology, and related disciplinary arenas.

Social constructionism has had a major impact on gender analysis, invigorating both gender research and theoretical approaches (e.g., discussions of doing gender theory, relational theory, and intersectional analysis). From a social constructionist viewpoint, we must learn and do gender (masculinities and femininities) in order for gender differences and inequalities to exist. We also build these differences and inequalities into the patterns of large social arrangements such as social institutions. Take education. Men predominate in higher education and school administration, while women are found at the elementary and preschool levels (Connell, 2010). Theories rooted in the fundamental principles of gender social construction follow.

“Doing Gender” Theory

Drawing on the work of symbolic interactionism, specifically dramaturgy (Goffman) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel), Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman in 1987 published an article simply titled “Doing Gender.” In this article, they challenged assumptions of the two previous decades of research that examined “sex differences” or “sex roles.” They argued that gender is a *master identity*, which is a product of social interactions and “doing,” not simply the acting out of a role on a social stage. They saw gender as a complicated process by which we categorize individuals into two sex categories based on what we assume to be their sex (male or female). Interaction in contemporary Western societies is based on “knowing the sex” of the individual we are interacting with. However, we have no way of actually knowing an individual’s sex (genitalia or hormones); therefore, we infer sex categories based on outward characteristics such as hairstyle, clothing, etc. Because we infer sex categories of the individuals we meet, West and Zimmerman argue that we are likely to question those who break from expected gendered behaviors for the sex categories we assign to them. We are also accountable for our own gender-appropriate behavior. Interaction in most societies becomes particularly difficult if one’s

sex category or gender is ambiguous, as you will read in Lucal’s article in Chapter 1.

Thus, this process of being accountable makes it important for individuals to display appropriate gendered behavior at all times in all situations. As such, “doing gender” becomes a salient part of social interactions and embedded in social institutions. As they note, “Insofar as a society is partitioned by ‘essential’ differences between women and men and placement in a sex category is both relevant and enforced, doing gender is unavoidable” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137).

Of course, they recognize that not everyone has the same resources (such as time, money, and/or expertise) to “do gender” and that gender accomplishment varies across social situations. In considering the discussion of who talks more, “doing gender” might explain why men talk more in work groups, as they attempt to portray their gendered masculinity while women may be doing more gender-appropriate emotion work such as asking questions and filling in silences. As such, when men and women accomplish gender as expected for the sex categories they display and are assigned to by others, they are socially constructing gender.

This concept of “doing gender” is used in many articles included in this book, but the use of the concept is not always consistent with the way the authors originally presented it (West & Zimmerman, 2009). The article by Nikki Jones included in Chapter 2 is part of a 2009 symposium considering the original 1987 article and its implications, in which she examines the challenges of doing gender for young, poor Black girls. Doing gender is a concept that helped move the discussions of sex/gender to a different level where interactions (micro) and institutions (macro) can be studied simultaneously and gender becomes a more lived experience, rather than a “role.”

Performative Theory

Judith Butler, a philosopher, conceptualizes gender as a performative act. Like West and Zimmerman, she emphasizes that gender is not a performance, or “a certain kind of enactment”

(Butler, 2009, p. i). Instead, she argues that gender identities are understood and agreed on by self and others through bodily acts (e.g., walk and gestures) and speech acts. She argues that gender is always negotiated in a system of power that establishes norms within which it is reproduced or, when the norms are challenged, altered (Butler, 2009). As such, performative theory focuses on the intersubjective creation of gender in relationship to the larger social structure.

Postmodern Theories

Postmodernism focuses on the way knowledge about gender is constructed, not on explaining gender relationships themselves. To postmodernists, knowledge is never absolute—it is always situated in a social reality that is specific to a historical time period. Postmodernism is based on the idea that it is impossible for anyone to see the world without presuppositions. From a postmodernist perspective, then, gender is socially constructed through discourses, which are the “series of stories” we use to explain our world (Andersen, 2004). Postmodernists attempt to “deconstruct” the discourses or stories used to support a group’s beliefs about gender (Andersen, 2004; Lorber, 2001). For example, Jane Flax argues that to fully understand gender in Western cultures, we must deconstruct the meanings in Western religious, scientific, and other discourses relative to “biology/sex/gender/nature” (cited in Lorber, 2001, p. 199). As you will come to understand from the readings in Chapters 1 and 3 (e.g., Nanda and Helliwell), the association between sex and gender in Western scientific (e.g., theories and texts) and nonscientific (e.g., films, newspapers, media) discourses is not shared in other cultural contexts. Thus, for postmodernists, gender is a product of the discourses within particular social contexts that define and explain gender.

Queer Theories

Queer theories borrow from the original meaning of the word *queer* to refer to that which is “outside ordinary and narrow interpretations”

(Plante, 2006, p. 62). Queer theorists are most concerned with understanding sexualities in terms of the idea that (sexual) identities are flexible, fluid, and changing, rather than fixed. In addition, queer theorists argue that identity and behavior must be separated. Thus, we cannot assume that people are what they do. From the vantage point of this theory, gender categories, much like sexual categories, are simplistic and problematic. Real people cannot be lumped together and understood in relationship to big cultural categories such as men and women, heterosexual and homosexual (Plante, 2006).

Relational Theory

The relational theory of gender was developed in response to the problems of the “sex roles” model and other limited views of gender (e.g., categoricalism, as critiqued by queer theory above). Connell (2000) states that a gender relations approach opens up an understanding of “the different dimensions of gender, the relation between bodies and society, and the patterning of gender” (pp. 23–24). Specifically, from a relational viewpoint, (1) gender is a way of organizing social practice (e.g., child care and household labor) at the personal, interactional, and institutional levels of life; (2) gender is a social practice related to bodies and what bodies do but *cannot* be reduced to bodies or biology; and (3) masculinities and femininities can be understood as *gender projects* that produce the *gender order* of a society and interact with other social structures such as race and class (pp. 24–28).

Feminist Theories

Feminist theorists expanded on the ideas of theorists such as Marx and Engels, turning attention to the causes of women’s oppression. There are many schools of feminist thought. Here, we briefly introduce you to those typically covered in overviews (see Chapter 10 for discussion of feminist theories such as “do-it-yourself” feminism). One group, socialist feminists, continued to emphasize the role of capitalism in interaction

with a patriarchal family structure as the basis for the exploitation of women. These theorists argue that economic and power benefits accrue to men who dominate women in capitalist societies. Another group, radical feminists, argues that patriarchy—the domination of men over women—is the fundamental form of oppression of women. Both socialist and radical feminists call for far-reaching changes in all institutional arrangements and cultural forms, including the dismantling of systems of oppression such as sexism, racism, and classism; replacing capitalism with socialism; developing more egalitarian family systems; and making other structural changes (e.g., Bart & Moran, 1993; Daly, 1978; Dworkin, 1987; MacKinnon, 1989).

Not all feminist theorists call for deep, structural, and cultural changes. Liberal feminists are inclined to work toward a more equitable form of democratic capitalism. They argue that policies such as Title IX and affirmative action laws opened up opportunities for women in education and increased the number of women professionals, such as physicians. These feminists strive to achieve gender equality by removing barriers to women's freedom of choice and equal participation in all realms of life, eradicating sexist stereotypes, and guaranteeing equal access and treatment for women in both public and private arenas (e.g., Reskin & Roos, 1990; Schwartz, 1994; Steinberg, 1982; Vannoy-Hiller & Philliber, 1989; Weitzman, 1985).

Although the liberal feminist stance may seem to be the most pragmatic form of feminism, many of the changes brought about by liberal varieties of feminism have “served the interests of only the most privileged women” (Motta, Fominaya, Eschle, & Cox, 2011, p. 5). Additionally, liberal feminist approaches that work with the state or attempt to gain formal equal rights within a fundamentally exploitive labor market fail to challenge the growth of neoliberal globalism and the worsening situation of many people in the face of unfettered markets, privatization, and imperialism (Motta et al., 2011; e.g., see discussion of the Great Recession in Chapter 5). In response to these kinds of issues and problems, 21st century

feminists are revisiting and reinventing feminist thinking and practice to create a “more emancipatory feminism” that can lead to “post-patriarchal, anti-neoliberal politics” (Motta et al., 2011, p. 2; see readings in Chapter 10).

Intersectional or Prismatic Theories

A major shortcoming with many of the theoretical perspectives just described is their failure to recognize how gender interacts with other social categories or prisms of difference and inequality within societies, including race/ethnicity, social class, sexuality, age, and ability/disability (see Chapter 2). A growing number of social scientists are responding to the problem of incorporating multiple social categories in their research by developing a new form of analysis, often described as intersectional analysis, which we also refer to as prismatic analysis in this book. Chapter 2 explores these theories of how gender interacts with other prisms of difference and inequality to create complex patterns. Without an appreciation of the interactions of socially constructed categories of difference and inequality, or what we call prisms, we end up with not only an incomplete but also an inaccurate explanation of gender.

As you read through the articles in this book, consider the basis for the authors' arguments in each reading. How do the authors apply the theories just described? What observations, data, or works of other social science researchers do these authors use to support their claims? Use a critical eye to examine the evidence as you reconsider the assumptions about gender that guide your life.

THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF GENDER: PRISMS, PATTERNS, AND POSSIBILITIES

Before beginning the readings that take us through the kaleidoscope of gender, let us briefly review the three themes that shape the book's structure: prisms, patterns, and possibilities.

Part I: Prisms

Understanding the prisms that shape our experiences provides an essential basis for the book. Chapter 1 explores the meanings of the pivotal prism—gender—and its relationship to biological sex. Chapter 2 presents an array of prisms or socially constructed categories that interact with gender in many human societies, such as race/ethnicity, social class, sexuality, age, and ability/disability. Chapter 3 focuses on the prism of culture/nationality, which alters the meaning and practice of gender in surprising ways.

Part II: Patterns

The prisms of the kaleidoscope create an array of patterned expressions and experiences of femininity and masculinity. Part II of this book examines some of these patterns. We look at how people learn, internalize, and “do” gender (Chapter 4); how gender is exploited by capitalism (Chapter 5); how gender acts on bodies, sexualities, and emotions (Chapter 6); how gendered patterns are reproduced and modified in work (Chapter 7); how gender is created and transformed in our intimate relationships (Chapter 8); and how conformity to patterns of gender is enforced and maintained (Chapter 9).

Part III: Possibilities

In much the same way as the colors and patterns of kaleidoscopic images flow, gendered patterns and meanings are inherently changeable. Chapter 10 examines the shifting sands of the genderscape and reminds us of the many possibilities for change. Finally, in the Epilogue, we examine changes we have seen and encourage you to envision future changes.

We use the metaphor of the gender kaleidoscope to discover what is going on under the surface of a society whose way of life we don’t often penetrate in a nondefensive, disciplined, and deep fashion. In doing so, we will expose a reality that

is astonishing in its complexity, ambiguity, and fluidity. With the kaleidoscope, you never know what’s coming next. Come along with us as we begin the adventure of looking through the kaleidoscope of gender.

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