CHAPTER 1

Developing a Critical Gender/Sex Lens

Gender, the behaviors and appearances society dictates a body of a particular sex should perform, structures people's understanding of themselves and each other. Communication is the process by which this happens. Whether in a person's communication or in how others interpret and talk about the person, gender is "always lurking" in interactions (Deutsch, 2007, p. 116). Gender is present in an individual's gender performance and in other messages that create, sustain, or challenge gender expectations. To illustrate this, consider an example from popular culture: the seemingly innocent custom of assigning infants pink or blue based on the baby's biological sex.

- When parents announce the birth of a child, typically what is the first question asked? "Is it a boy or girl?" or "Is the baby healthy?" "Is the baby eating and sleeping well?" "Is the birth mother okay?"
- What do birth celebration cards look like? Spend some time in the greeting card section of a store, and you will find two main choices: pink or blue, and the pink cards are decorated with flowers and docile girls while the blue cards are decorated with animals or transportation vehicles (planes, trains, automobiles, and ships) and active boys.
- What mistake tends to cause people the most embarrassment when complimenting new parents on the birth of their child? What happens if you say, upon seeing a baby boy, "Isn't she pretty" instead of "He is so big"? Or what happens if you say, upon seeing a baby girl, "Wow, what a bruiser" instead of "She is so cute"?

At the moment of birth (before, if sex identification happens in vitro), people differentiate children on the basis of sex and begin to impose gendered expectations on them with clothing, activities, and interactions (Zosuls, Miller, Ruble, Martin, & Fabes, 2011).
In case you think pink and blue color designations have been practiced forever or exist across cultures, consider this:

- Color segregation on the basis of sex is primarily a U.S. and Western European custom, although Western commercialization spread it globally.
- Sex-based color assignments did not appear until the early 1900s. When first assigned, the generally accepted rule was pink for the boy and blue for the girl. Pink was thought to be a more decisive and stronger color while blue was seen as delicate and dainty (*Ladies Home Journal*, June 1918, as cited in Frassanito & Pettorini, 2008).
- The colors assigned to babies did not switch until the 1950s. No one seems to know why. Advice books and magazines targeted at White, upper-class people in the United States stipulated pink was for girls and blue was for boys.
- Although sex-segregated colors lessened in the 1970s, by the 1980s their dominance returned, as is evidenced by the fuchsia pink and cobalt blue aisles of toys at major retailers (McCormick, 2011; Paoletti, 2012).

The color-coding of children inspired artist JeongMee Yoon’s “The Pink and Blue Project.” Noting the international sex-targeted marketing, Yoon photographed children in the United States and South Korea. The results were visually astounding. Rooms awash in blue for boys and pink for girls (visit “The Blue Project” *Jake and His Blue Things*, 2006 and “The Pink Project” *Dayeun and Her Pink Things*, 2007 at http://www.jeongmeeyoon.com/aw_pinkblue.htm).

If you look at babies dressed in blue or pink, you may see an unremarkable cultural practice. But if you look at the practice through a critical gendered lens, you might begin to ask some questions: Why do we need to assign sex to infants? What does it mean that pink is seen as passive and blue is seen as strong? Why does it seem that a cultural choice is made to appear as a biological necessity?

Obviously, the colors are not biologically caused or universally gendered the same way. The color designations result from the communication practices of specific time periods in commercialized cultures and a particular set of political beliefs about differences between women and men. Further, the color designations indicate how people are conditioned to differentiate between sexes and genders. Although babies may now wear green, yellow, and purple, few parents are daring enough to dress a boy baby in pink or a girl baby in blue. The symbols people use to describe the sexes (pink or blue, pretty or strong), and the way they interact with others on the basis of their sex, matter.

This example reveals that gender is communicated in a variety of forms, even those as mundane as greeting cards. Communication scholar Bren Murphy (1994) made this clear in an analysis of holiday cards targeted at children, noting cards are “part of a social discourse that constructs everyday gender patterns and perceptions” (p. 29). A variety of cultural texts “construct our understandings of gender and gendered relationships” (Keith, 2009, p. iv). Thus, to study gender in communication, you need to study not only how gendered bodies communicate, but also how gender is constructed through communication in cultural texts.
Tellingly, many people do not know how to talk to or about a person without first categorizing that person as female or male. This very conundrum was the focus of one episode of the Disney Channel’s animated series *Lloyd in Space*, about the adventures of a group of teenage aliens (see Figure 1.1).

In the ninth episode of season three, “Neither Boy Nor Girl,” the main characters argue over the relative merits of two bands, the girls advocating for Aurora and the boys for Total Cosmic Annihilation. They decide the tie-breaking vote belongs to the new kid: Zoit. After Zoit’s answer praising both bands, the boys and the girls each claim Zoit was their sex. Given this is a world populated by aliens, you might assume the human sex binary no longer applied, but it did. As this screen shot illustrates, even alien bodies can be marked in ways that sex and gender them. Body size and shape, hair length, clothing, lip coloration and plumpness, eyelashes, and posture mark some of the bodies as boy and others as girl, except for Zoit. Zoit is purple, does not wear clothes, and has expressive eyes. Visually, no explicit clues are provided about sex.

Demonstrating the obsession with categorizing people by sex, the remainder of the episode is spent trying to box Zoit into one sex. The characters try observing Zoit’s preference in notebook design (Zoit likes monsters and rainbows), whether Zoit rides a “boy bike” or “girl bike” (Zoit rides a unicycle), and which restroom Zoit uses after imbibing an extra-large 640 fluid ounce drink (Zoit claims to be absorbent). Like many, the characters conflate sex and gender, assuming that by observing things Zoit says and does, they can figure out Zoit’s biological designation.
Eventually, the boys and girls decided to ask Zoit: “OK, we gotta know. What the heck are you, a boy or a girl?” Zoit explained that their species is neither boy nor girl until their 13th birthday, when they are free to choose either. On Zoit’s 13th birthday, Zoit decided but kept it to themselves, again sending the friends into a flurry of questions, concluding with: “So we’ll never find out if you’re a boy or a girl?” To this, Zoit replied: “You’ll find out some day when I get a crush on one of you.” Here, another conflation occurred: between sex and sexual orientation.

To say that most gender and sex differences are socially constructed rather than biological does not mean that no differences exist or that perceived differences do not matter. Our argument throughout this textbook is that a range of differences exists. We celebrate human beings’ wonderful diversity. To limit one’s understanding of diverse human communication to only two choices, feminine or masculine, reinforces stereotypes. Still, that is often how people think about gender in communication—as a description of the differences between how women and men communicate. If you start from the assumption that women and men communicate differently, then you tend to see only differences between them rather than the more common similarities (Dindia, 2006).

More than actual differences in communication patterns, cultural and individual perceptions of women’s and men’s behaviors are gendered. People see baby girls and baby boys as different because people code them that way; girls are pink, sweet, and pretty, and boys are blue, agile, and burly. This leads people to interact differently with babies, coddling ones they think are girls and playing more roughly with ones they think are boys (Frisch, 1977; Rubinstein, 2001). Emphasizing sex differences reinforces separate expectations about how women and men should behave. In doing so, it restricts what is considered acceptable behavior for all people, and it puts rigid limitations on children’s potential.

In *The Truth About Girls and Boys: Challenging Toxic Stereotypes About Our Children*, journalist Caryl Rivers and psychologist Rosalind Barnett (2011) argued that gendered social myths are growing out of control, supported by popular media and consumer demand. As a result, a new biological determinism is emerging supported by questionable data that human beings are born with “brains in pink and blue” (p. 10). This social myth creates a self-fulfilling prophecy to which parents and teachers contribute by maintaining assumptions of sex-based gender differences. Instead, “human beings have multiple intelligences that defy simple gender pigeonholes. Unfortunately, the real (and complex) story line is generally missing from the popular media. It is buried in scholarly peer-reviewed journals and articles that seldom see the light of day” (p. 2). We exhume some of the complexity in this textbook.

Although the predominant culture continues to assume that women and men are different, and therefore communicate in different ways, actual research does not support this (e.g., Anderson & Leaper, 1998; Burleson & Kunkel, 2006; Edwards & Hamilton, 2004; Holmstrom, 2009). Researchers have found that gendered behavior variances among women and among men are actually greater than those between women and men (Burleson & Kunkel, 2006; Dindia, 2006; Goodwin & Kyrratzis, 2014; Hyde, 2005, 2007; Mare & Waldron, 2006; Ye & Palomares, 2013). Many other factors affect behavior, such as social roles, ethnicity, individual differences, and
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Purpose of the interaction (Aries, 2006; Deutsch, 2007; Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2014). The focus exclusively on sex differences is too simplistic. Consider the following question: Do all women around the world and across ethnic groups and generations communicate the same way? Do all men?

People believe in universal sex and gender differences for a variety of reasons. For starters, sex is a primary way in which people categorize themselves and others, and people have a great deal invested in maintaining these categories. Because society expects everyone to be heterosexual unless proven otherwise, early on, girls and boys are encouraged to see each other as the “opposite” sex and to vie for the other’s attention. Heterosexual dating is a primary means to popularity for many in U.S. middle and high schools. And heterosexual weddings are the ultimate heterosexual social ritual (Ingraham, 2008), so much so that some states amended their constitutions to bar marriage among gays and lesbians. It took the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Obergefell v. Hodges to make clear that the Constitution requires states to recognize marriage between same-sex individuals.

The continued cultural insistence on differences despite a massive amount of research that disconfirms this view is political. Subscribing to a differences perspective maintains the status quo, and in that status quo particular groups are privileged (heterosexuals, men, Whites) while others are marginalized and subordinated (homosexuals, women, people of color). This is not to blame individual White men or individual heterosexuals for power differentials but to recognize all people are complicit in the process when they fail to question it. Linguist Mary Crawford (1995) explained that if communication problems were due solely to gender differences and not to group power or status, women and men could borrow each other’s communication styles with similar effectiveness. Instead, the same communication styles do not perform equally well for all people. What style works depends on the situation, the social status of the speaker, and the power relations between the speaker and listener.

Another reason why the culture continues to embrace (empirically disproved) gender and sex differences is that it sells. If you are not convinced, check out how retail sellers target specific sexes in toy aisles, cosmetics, wedding planning, sports, music, and gaming. Yoon’s (n.d.) “The Pink and Blue Projects” provides visual evidence of “the influence of pervasive commercial advertisements aimed at little girls and their parents.”

In this book, we summarize research on gender in communication and equip you with critical analytical tools to develop your own informed opinions about that research, society’s gender expectations, and prevailing cultural views. To accomplish this, it is necessary to understand how predominant cultural views about gender and sex create a gendered lens through which people view reality. This lens can become so embedded that people do not realize how it limits their perceptions of reality. We hope to help you construct a more critical gendered lens by providing analytic tools with which you can examine common assumptions about gender, sex, and communication.

A precise vocabulary is needed to develop a critical gendered lens; intersectionality, communication, and systemic violence are the central components of that vocabulary. Together these concepts provide a more complete understanding of
gendered cultural identity and how one does gendered identity work through communication.

Generally speaking, the term *identity* refers to how people see themselves, and how others see them, as individuals and as members of groups. *Identity* includes concepts such as personality; the multiple group identities one holds—for example, gender, sex, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality; and contextual role identities—for example, friend, lover, student, supervisor, community member. A person's identity has multiple interacting, and sometimes contradicting, facets (Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006; Tracy, 2002). For example, the social expectations of a person who identifies as a man may seem to contradict with the role that person plays as a teacher or day care provider.

Although people may prefer to box others into set categories, identity is not fixed and unchanging. Rather it is constantly negotiated through intrapersonal communication with oneself, interpersonal communication with others, and public communication circulating in mass media and popular culture. This does not mean that people can change their identities on a whim. Although identity is in constant flux, it is perceived as stable. As such, individuals and groups have some control over their identity construction, but much of the predominant cultural assumptions extend beyond one's awareness or control (Butler, 2004; Tracy, 2002).

**Intersectionality**

Gender and sex are woven into a person's identity and are axes along which social power is organized. But writing a book that focuses only on gender in communication would be reductive. It is impossible to separate gender/sex from other facets of identity or other social categories along which power is organized. Communication scholar Bernadette Marie Calafell (2014) explained: "Like many women of color before me, I have never been able to be just a woman. . . . My womanhood is messy" (p. 267).

Ethnicity, class, sex, sexual orientation, citizenship status, religion, and gender all intersect to form a person's identity and to inform social relations. Before you can understand gender in communication, you first need to understand that how a person's gender identity is performed is not separable from the person's ethnicity, class, sex, sexual orientation, citizenship status, and religion. Additionally, to study how gender is an arena in which power is exercised, you need to understand how gender intersects with other axes along which social power is exercised.

**Intersectionality** is a theory of identity and of oppression. Women's and gender studies professor Vivian M. May (2015) explained that intersectionality “approaches lived identities as interlaced and systems of oppression as enmeshed and mutually reinforcing” (p. 3). Thus, intersectionality enables analysis of communication both at the “micropolitical level of everyday life and at the macropolitical level of social structures, material practices, and cultural norms” (p. 5). An intersectional approach should inform how people understand interpersonal communication, organizational cultures, pay inequity, and mass-mediated messages.
Legal scholar and critical race feminist Adrien Wing (1997) explained the theory of intersectionality as the idea that identity is “multiplicative” rather than additive (p. 30). Instead of understanding identity as the addition of one independent element to another and another, like in a pop-bead necklace, identity makes more sense if you think of each element as inextricably linked with the others. An intersectional approach makes clear that all facets of identity are integral, interlocking parts of a whole.

African American women were the first to make this point clear. Activists in the late 1800s and early 1900s, such as Sojourner Truth, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, all noted how sex and race intersected in a way that made Black women's social location and struggles unique. Recognizing the contribution of their foremothers, a group of Black feminists wrote the Combahee River Collective Statement in 1974 in which they outlined how “the major systems of oppression are interlocking.” In the Statement, they explained:

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women’s lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.

Author Audre Lorde (1984) offered a description of how an intersectional approach is necessary to fully understand and accept your own identity:

As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present that as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as a part of my living. (p. 120)

Lorde’s metaphor ingredients is useful when explaining intersectionality. For example, a cake is an object with ingredients such as flour, eggs, oil, sugar, and milk that can exist separately from each other but, once combined, each element influences the others. Even though the cake contains all the ingredients, none are recognizable in their separate forms. A cake is not just flour and eggs and sugar and oil and milk. A cake is a cake only when the ingredients are so fused together that they cannot be separated again. Like a cake, human identity is the result of a fascinating alchemic process in which ingredients are fused in such a way that each is influenced by the others, to the point where you
cannot extricate the flour from the cake once it is baked. The flour is not simply flour (and gender is not simply gender) once fused with other ingredients. Because identity ingredients interact, you cannot understand how a person does gender unless you also consider how that person’s gender, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national identity, and socioeconomic class interact to demand a particular gender performance. Researchers who take only gender into account do not recognize that identity actually occurs as a complex, synergistic, infused whole that becomes something completely different when parts are ignored, forgotten, and unnamed (Collins, 1998).

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), a lawyer and legal scholar, was the first to use the word intersectionality to describe how the oppression faced by Black women was distinct from oppression solely from race or sex. Crenshaw analyzed how employment nondiscrimination law that used the discrete categories of sex and race (as well as color, religion, and national origin) failed to protect Black women who face forms of discrimination that emanate from the intersection of race and sex. Crenshaw’s insights allowed scholars to articulate how “major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time, for example, race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and age operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but build on each other and work together” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 4). The interactions matter.

Intersectionality as a theory of identity is helpful because it prevents reducing complex identities down to a single ingredient and then attributing to the ingredient causal power to explain why a person acts in a particular way. Intersectionality as a theory of power is helpful because it shifts attention away from “preoccupations with intentional prejudice and toward perspectives grounded in analysis of systemic dynamics and institutional power” (Chun, Lipsitz, & Shin, 2013, p. 922). With this overarching understanding of intersectionality, we now turn to a consideration of the ingredients.

**Gender and Sex, Gender/Sex**

If you have ever filled out a survey, you likely have been asked about your gender and then given the options of male or female. In this example, the words sex and gender are used interchangeably, even though they refer to two analytically distinct things. Sex refers to biological designations (e.g., female, male, intersex, trans), while gender refers to the social expectations attached to how particular bodies should act and appear and, thus, is socially constructed. It is important to understand the distinction between the two terms while, at the same time, recognizing their inextricable interconnection.

Before the 1970s, most people assumed people’s sex determined their behavior; no concept of gender as distinct from sex existed. In the late 1970s, researchers began using the term gender as distinct from sex to identify personal attributes of women and men (Unger, 1979). Gender referred to one’s identity and self-presentation—that is, the degree to which a person associated themselves with what society had prescribed as appropriate behavior given their sex. You can probably brainstorm expected sex-specific stereotypical gender attributes. Feminine attributes are to be emotional, a caretaker, sensitive, compassionate, revealingly dressed; masculine attributes are to be rational, independent, tough, aggressive, comfortably dressed.
(Coates, 2004; Eagly & Koenig, 2006; Eliot, 2009b; Lorber & Moore, 2007). When researchers embraced the concept of gender, sex and gender were seen as distinct; one's sex did not determine one's gender, but social structures linked particular gender presentations with particular sexed bodies.

These early understandings of gender placed variances in human identity on a continuum rather than casting them as two binary or opposite categories where one is either male/masculine or female/feminine. The continuum helped make visible that instead of two independent categories, degrees of gender are possible (see Figure 1.2).

One could be more masculine (and less feminine) or more feminine (and less masculine). Because researchers saw gender as socially prescribed rather than biologically caused, they assumed that people identify to varying degrees with masculinity and femininity rather than just one or the other. This was heralded as an important breakthrough. No longer were authors saying all men acted one way and all women another, based solely on their biological sex. However, the continuum still set up masculine and feminine as opposites and as trading off with each other; as you were more of one, you were less of the other.

Further developing this idea, psychologist Sandra Bem (1974) coined the term androgyny by combining two Greek words: andros meaning “male” and gyné meaning “female.” Bem developed a questionnaire called the Sex-Role Inventory (SRI) to identify a person’s gender orientation on a continuum from highly feminine to highly masculine, androgynous (high in both), or undifferentiated (low in both masculine and feminine traits). Androgynous persons are believed to have more behavioral flexibility. Instead of seeing masculinity and femininity as a zero-sum tradeoff on a continuum, Bem believed one could exhibit characteristics of both (see Figure 1.3).
Now, people talk not just about one form of femininity and one form of masculinity, but about femininities and masculinities. Many ways to be feminine and masculine exist, and many ways express gender that are neither masculine nor feminine.

W. Kamau Bell, comic and host of United Shades of America, reflected on their early career in comedy:

Black comedy clubs... felt like public school but grown up. It's like, these are the same kids when I was a kid where I felt like I was being made fun of because I wasn't listening to the right music or I wasn't being a black man in the right way. (as cited in Gross, 2017)

Although focusing on gender instead of sex was meant to be a step away from overgeneralizing people's identities based on their sex, masculinity and femininity are still stereotypes, prescribing how women and men are supposed to behave (Crawford & Fox, 2007). Because of this criticism, researchers have dropped the terms masculine and feminine, relying instead on measures of dominance, nurturance, orientation toward self versus others, and so forth, but the stereotypical inferences are still present. There is no ideal social science means to study gender identity that avoids reinforcing the very characteristics it is trying to study.

If you use the term gender when you mean sex, you are not alone. Researchers and popular media often do not use the concept of gender correctly or consistently (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). If you read published research, many claim to have found gender differences or similarities, when in actuality they never asked for or assessed the participants' gendered self-identities. They merely asked participants to label themselves as biologically female or male and then assumed that by studying females they could determine what was feminine and that by studying males they could determine what was masculine. Most people unintentionally conflate sex and gender.

However, some intentionally rethink the relationship between sex and gender, claiming sex, too, is socially constructed. Gender theorist Judith Butler (1990a) posited that “perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (pp. 9–10). Butler’s argument is that the only way a person can come to understand anything, even biology, is through language and cultural experience. The understanding of the body and its relationship to identity is always mediated by the words and symbols people use to talk about the body. In the words of Butler (1993), “There is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body” (p. 10). Thus, sex is as much a social construction as gender, and bodies have no meaning separate from the meaning language gives them. The argument that people's biological sex is influenced by communication is not to deny the existence
of a material body "but to insist that our apprehension of it, our understanding of it, is necessarily mediated by the contexts in which we speak" (Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 7; italics in original).

When the predominant culture names the sex of a body female or male (and nothing else), the culture engages in an act of communication that has "normative force" because it recognizes some parts of a person but not all (Butler, 1993, p. 11). Even as the body is referenced, a particular formation occurs—a formation of the body as either female or male. Butler identified the binary linguistic framing of bodies as an act of power because it refuses to recognize the existence of those who do not fit into the male/female binary. The reality, however, is that many bodies do not fit the binary of female or male.

As early as 1993, developmental geneticist Anne Fausto-Sterling argued that people should recognize at least five sexes, with an infinite range in between: "Biologically speaking, there are many gradations running from female to male; and depending on how one calls the shots, one can argue that along that spectrum lie at least five sexes [female, ferm, herm, merm, male]—and perhaps even more" (p. 21). If language names only two sexes, then only two will be seen and any body that does not fit into the two sexes will be forced to fit, or be considered an "it"—not human. The power of language to construct social reality is illustrated by what has been done to those bodies.

**Intersex** is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male (Intersex Society of North America, 2008). Lest you think this is an extraordinarily rare medical phenomenon, from 1,000 to 15,000 intersex babies are born a year in the United States (Greenberg, 2012, p. 7). In a study that reviewed medical literature from 1955 to 2000, the authors concluded that intersex babies may account for as many as 2% of live births (Blackless et al., 2000).

An infant born who did not fit into the male/female binary used to be considered a “medical emergency” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 45) and, until new policies were proposed in 2005, in European countries, parents were told to decide within the child’s first day of life if the baby will be male or female (Pasterski, Prentice, & Hughes, 2010). The rate of infant genital surgery is still high, and a tendency persists to surgically alter infants’ genitals to female because the vagina is supposedly easier to construct surgically. Butler (2004) pointed out that this practice shows how narrowly defined “normal” is in society, and the failure to recognize that intersex persons are part of the human continuum prevents them from being treated humanely.

Despite the biological reality of more than two sexes, the way U.S. society talks about and legislates sex constantly reinforces the idea that there are only two sexes (and that one’s sex determines one’s gender). Law professor Julie Greenberg (1999) explained how “despite medical and anthropological studies to the contrary, the law presumes a binary sex and gender model. The law ignores the millions of people who are intersexed” (p. 275). The language of law has structured the reality of sex and gender in such a way that the grand diversity of human existence is stifled.
In addition to the recognition that sex is as socially constructed as gender, scholars recognize that social constructions (like gender) can be as difficult to change as things people consider biological. Butler (2004) argued that gender is often as immutable as sex, given how social institutions and language constantly reiterate and reinscribe it. One of the primary ways sex and gender discipline bodies is through the enshrinement of binary views (meaning you have either one choice or another) of one’s sex, gender, and sexuality. A person who did not fit in the sex/gender binary (wherein you are either a man or a woman and men are masculine and women are feminine) was unintelligible; people lacked the language to name and understand them. This is why new terms have entered into vocabulary, such as genderqueer, a term used to “defy all categories of culturally defined gender”; it is “gender free” or “gender neutral,” claiming an identity “outside gender” (Ehrensaft, 2011, p. 531). New terms enable people to think outside the binary. English professor Jordynn Jack (2012) offered copia, the classical rhetorical concept of inventing as many terms as possible for a concept, as an alternative to the binary and the continuum. Included in Jack’s copia: “genderqueer, transgender[7], femme, butch, boi, neutrois, androgyne, bi- or tri-gender, third gender, and even geek” (p. 3).

We see gender and sex as something you do, not something you are, and gender is done by you, between individuals, and by institutions. Gender scholar A. Finn Enke (2012) explained that “there is no natural process by which anyone becomes woman, and . . . everyone’s gender is made. Gender, and also sex, are made through complex social and technical manipulations that naturalize some while” making others seem unnatural (p. 1). Linguist Lal Zimman (2012) complicated the term gender even further based on research with transgender men, suggesting distinctions between gender assignment at birth, gender role socialization, the gender identity one claims at any given time, gender presentation, and the variety of ways an individual may perform their gender in a given context “rather than treating gender as a simple binary or even a singular continuum” (p. 161).

If sex and gender are something you do rather than something you are or have, they can be done in a wide variety of ways. If, in your doing, you are performing social scripts, then gender and sex are never just individual quirks, but instead are social institutions. To be able to see how gender and sex are done by and to people, you first need to recognize neither is natural or biologically determined. Gender and sex are not things that belong to an individual. Rather, gender and sex are done by people interacting in accordance with institutional and cultural demands. Gender and sex are social institutions that individuals express. People experience their gender and sex together, and sex and gender are both socially constructed, and hence changeable, while at the same time being difficult to change.

We use the term gender/sex in this textbook to emphasize the interrelation between the concepts of gender and sex. When we discuss gender in communication, we always discuss sex in communication because communication that is about gender, that is influenced by gender, and that differentiates gender also always is about sex, is influenced by sex, and differentiates sex.

To summarize, researchers in the field of communication studies began by focusing on sex, visualizing it as a binary. They progressed to using the term gender
as two culturally imposed opposite identities located on one continuum. This approach was nuanced to recognize gender as not necessarily a zero-sum game; androgynous people could have characteristics of both masculinity and femininity. This allowed the recognition of more variances of behavior and identity (Slesaransky-Poe & García, 2009). However, even as scholars studied gender, they sometimes conflated it with sex. As scholars began to theorize gender as cultural, they also began to theorize sex as cultural. Thus, the distinctions between sex and gender were intentionally complicated. Now researchers are moving toward a much more diverse, realistic portrayal of gender/sex.

Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming

Transgender or trans is “used to describe individuals whose gender expression and behavior do not match the usual expectations associated with the male-female binary system” (Gherovici, 2010, p. xiii). Susan Stryker (2008), in Transgender History, noted how the term only came into “widespread use” in the last 20 years and is “still under construction,” but refers to people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender. Some people move away from their birth-assigned gender because they feel strongly that they properly belong to another gender in which it would be better for them to live; others want to strike out toward some new location, some space not yet clearly defined or concretely occupied; still others simply feel the need to get away from the conventional expectations bound up with the gender that was initially put upon them. In any case, it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition—that best characterizes the concept of “transgender.” (p. 1)

Trans and gender non-conforming people include those who identify as trans men (people assigned female at birth, AFAB, who identify as men); identify as trans women (people assigned male at birth, AMAB, who identify as women); reject the gender/sex binary or see themselves as nonbinary; choose to take hormones or not; or have surgical sexual organ changes or not. Thus, trans refers to “a constellation of practices and identities variably implicated in sexual and gender normativities” (West, 2014, p. 10).

The concept of normativity is helpful because it makes clear that some things are treated as the norm, or as normal, when they are statistically or diagnostically neither. Often that which is labeled normal is not really the most common; instead, it is normative, meaning it is the standard by which people are judged. Communication scholar Gus Yep (2003) defined normativity as the “process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values” (p. 18).
Normativities tied to the sex/gender binary result in those who do not fit the binary being labeled as bad, undesirable, immoral, irrational, and inferior. So the sex binary has been normalized, made to appear right, even though it is not the only way to organize understandings of sex.

The cultural disciplining of transgender persons is an example of the way the sex/gender binary constructs sex and gender. Until 2012, the standard diagnostic manual used by U.S. mental health practitioners identified persons who desire to be “another sex” or participate in the pastimes of the “other sex” as having a disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, pp. 576–577). Gender identity disorder was the label given to this “dysfunction.” It was also used for individuals with homosexual or bisexual tendencies, and some practitioners attempted to alter the individuals’ gender identities. However, psychotherapy rarely changes gender identity (Gherovici, 2010; Reiss, 2009; Unger & Crawford, 1992). Intersex and transgender activists raised the question of how medical professionals can ascertain a person’s “real” gender/sex identity. They argued that gender should be a matter of personal choice (Schilt, 2011). As a result of this activism, the American Psychiatric Association decided in 2012 to change its diagnostic manual so that it no longer referred to gender identity disorder but instead to gender dysphoria (Lennard, 2012). In the most recent revision, DSM-5, gender dysphoria is diagnosed when there is incongruence between a person’s assigned sex and their gendered behaviors, and it causes significant distress (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

To provide a language that lets people think outside the binary, activists have introduced new terms, like genderqueer, genderfluid, and trans, into the public vocabulary. The New York Times added the sex/gender-neutral Mx. as an alternative to Mr. and Ms. (Curkin, 2015). To provide a term parallel to trans, cis, short for cisgender or cissexual, was introduced in 1994 and popularized in the first decade of the 2000s (Enke, 2012, pp. 60–61). Cis refers to those whose gender self-identity and gender expression match the sex they were assigned at birth. However, even those who introduced this term still worry that it reinforces the very binary that trans folk challenge (Enke, 2012).

Transgender studies scholars note the importance of language and communication to trans people. Susan Stryker (2015) explained:

Transsexuals such as myself were then still subordinated to a hegemonic inter-locking of cissexist feminist censure and homosexual superiority, psycho-medical pathologization, legal proscription, mass media stereotyping, and public ridicule. The only option other than reactively saying “no we’re not” to every negative assertion about us was to change the conversation, to inaugurate a new language game. (p. 227)

To make trans people intelligible, to make them recognizable, new language was required. Existing language also has been stretched because old terms have seen their meanings shift. For example, in 2015 the Washington Post changed its style guide to allow the singular third person pronoun they (which typically was used when referring to more than one person) and in 2016 the American Dialect Society named the
singular *they* as its word of the year (Guo, 2016). Why? It is an alternative to *he* or *she*, terms that unnecessarily tend to sex/gender people.

**Sexuality and Romantic Attraction**

*Sexual orientation* describes the gender/sex of the people to whom you are physically attracted. *Heterosexual* refers to people who are sexually attracted to a person of the other sex. *Homosexual* refers to people who are sexually attracted to others who share their sex. *Bisexual* refers to people who are sexually attracted to both sexes. You might notice that these sexual orientations depend on a sex binary (same or other); if there are five sexes, which is the “other” sex? Again, the sex/gender binary limits human understanding, in this case, an understanding of sexuality.

New language has emerged, such as *pansexual*, which refers to those who are capable of being attracted to a person of any sex/gender. Celebrity Miley Cyrus declared they were pansexual, explaining, “I don’t relate to being boy or girl, and I don’t have to have my partner relate to boy or girl” (as cited in Petrusich, 2015).

*Sexual orientation* is about physical attraction while *romantic orientation* is about emotional attraction. Recognizing this distinction makes it possible to recognize those who are *asexual* and *aromantic*. *Asexual* (Ace) refers to those who are not sexually attracted to others; approximately 1% of the U.S. population identifies this way (Emens, 2014). *Aromantic* (Aro) refers to people who are not romantically attracted to others, meaning there is no desire to form an emotional relationship (Bogaert, 2015).

The way culture communicates about sexual orientation constructs and maintains the sex/gender binary and maintains heterosexuality as the norm (Rich, 1980). *Heteronormativity* describes how social institutions and policies reinforce the presumption that people are heterosexual and that gender and sex are natural binaries (Kitzinger, 2005). Persons who are discriminated against due to their sexual orientation are subordinated because they are perceived as sexual deviants. Sociologist Gayle Rubin (1984) stated, “The system of sexual oppression cuts across other modes of social inequality,” such as racial, class, ethnic, or gendered inequality, “sorting out individuals and groups according to its own intrinsic dynamics. It is not reducible” (p. 293). Conversely, discussions of gender and sex are intricately tied to sexual orientation and sexuality. They are not separable. In the study of gender/sex, people must recognize the role of heteronormativity, sexual identity, and romantic identity.

**Race and Ethnicity**

We want to be clear from the outset: Race is a social construction. Biologically, there is only one race: the human race. However, humans have long used race as a social construct to divide people from one another, to place them in categories and claim one category is better than another. Scientists have known for some time that race is not an accurate means by which to categorize human beings in terms of ancestry or genetics (Blakey, 1999; Long & Kittles, 2003; “Race,” 2011).
Society holds on to this false assumption that race is a meaningful category because believing in such differences is easy and it benefits those in power. We use the term *race* to recognize that many people self-identify with a particular ethnic identity and take great pride in it. However, to be clear, when we use the term *race*, we mean the *social construction* understood as race; we do not mean *race* as some biological designation.

*Race*, like gender/sex, has a socially constructed meaning that has real consequences. Sociologist Estelle Disch (2009) explained why and how we use the term in this book:

The term race is itself so problematic that many scholars regularly put the word in quotation marks to remind readers that it is a social construction rather than a valid biological category. Genetically, there is currently no such thing as “race” and the category makes little or no sense from a scientific standpoint. What is essential, of course, is the meaning that people in various cultural contexts attribute to differences in skin color or other physical characteristics. (p. 22)

To illustrate, consider that Germans, Irish, Italians, and Russians are now considered White in the United States, but after the great migration of the early 1900s up to the 1960s, they were considered “colored or other” (Foner & Fredrickson, 2005).

*Ethnicity*, too, is a contested term; identifying one’s ethnic origins is not as clear as researchers once thought, given the increasingly transnational world and how cultural labels are subject to change. *Ethnicity* is a term commonly used to refer to a group of people who share a cultural history, even though they may no longer live in the same geographic area (Zack, 1998).

One way to more clearly see the power of arbitrary social constructions of groups is to consider White identity. Whiteness is a socially constructed racial and ethnic category even if society typically does not recognize it as such. The central position of Whiteness in predominant U.S. culture allows it to be normalized to the extent that it almost disappears; it is deraced and nonethnic. Many who identify as White do not even recognize it is a category. They can readily list characteristics of other peoples, such as the expectation that Asians should be smart and that African Americans should be good at sports, but they have difficulty naming a quality that applies to Whites (Nakayama & Krizek, 1999). When race is conceptualized as natural rather than as culturally created, the power of this category is hidden (Kivel, 2002).

It is important to recognize Whiteness in the study of gender because, if one does not, race remains a concern only for those considered non-White, and gender, when studied alone, remains implicitly an identity belonging solely to Whites. What is important to remember is that, like gender/sex, when society constructs arbitrary racial and ethnic categories, these categories are rarely different and equal. Rather, race and ethnicity are tools of social oppression.

Throughout this book, we capitalize *Black* and *White* to clarify that we are referring to socially constructed racial categories and the politics of skin color rather than to hues on the color wheel. We hope to move beyond thinking just about differences, whether gender or ethnic differences, and instead induce thinking about...
power. As Patricia Hill Collins (1995) explained: “Difference is less a problem for me than racism, class exploitation, and gender oppression. Conceptualizing these systems of oppression as difference obfuscates the power relations and material inequalities that constitute oppression” (p. 494). Thus, when it comes to thinking about the category called race, our question is not “How are the races different?” but instead “Who benefits from the belief in difference?”

National Identity

*National identity* refers to a person’s immigration status, citizenship, and country allegiance. Interdisciplinary feminist scholars and global human rights activists were the first to explore how national cultural identities are gendered/sexed and how citizens tend to experience their national rights differently based on gender/sex (Enloe, 1989; Moghadam, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2003). International studies scholar Tamar Mayer (2000) posited that “control over access to the benefits of belonging to the nation is virtually always gendered” and that “the ability to define the nation lies mainly with men” (p. 2). The feeling of belonging to a nation and the privileges and oppressions contained therein are gendered/sexed in unique ways according to cultural norms, histories of religion, ethnic and class conflicts, economics, and much more.

Gender/sex issues around the world are extremely relevant to any study of gender in communication. Placing the study of gender in the context of national identity prevents assuming universal differences between women and men or, worse yet, assuming that research primarily conducted in the United States represents gendered lives around the world. Gender and ethnic studies scholar Nira Yuval-Davis (1999) explained, “Essentialist notions of difference . . . are very different from the notions of difference promoted by those of us who believe in the importance of incorporating notions of difference into democracy. In the first case notions of difference replace notions of equality—in the second case they encompass it” (p. 131). Recognizing national identities is an important part of a gender diversity approach to the study of gender/sex in communication.

When national identity is included in the study of gender/sex, the focus has usually been on citizens of economically disadvantaged countries. The influence of the United States as a nation has not been a primary focus in gender/sex in communication research. Instead, most of the research has focused on the one-to-one relationship level, as if it existed independently of national identity. Yet U.S. national identity and its economic power have had a profound influence on carving out gender identities worldwide. Gender/sex and national identity are related, not just for persons in economically disadvantaged countries, or in countries with more visible internal violence, but for U.S. citizens as well (Mayer, 2000; Mohanty, 2003).

Socioeconomic Class

In the United States, *socioeconomic class* refers to the social position people enjoy as a result of their income, education, occupation, and place of residence. The class to which a person belongs influences the expectations of how gender should
be performed. When children are told to “act like a lady” or “act like a gentleman,” the underlying message is usually about class. They are being told to act like a particular type of gender/sex, one that knows the upper-class gentle norms of politeness and identity performance. The message goes even further when children of color receive this message. They are being told to act like White upper-class people do. This command carries class-prescribed expectations of gendered/sexed behaviors that White upper-class people have controlled.

The field of communication studies has been slow to examine the ways in which class may affect communication in the United States. Yet it is clear class often determines how much leeway one is allowed in gender performance. For example, historian Glenna R. Matthews (1992) explained how working-class women were able to enter the public realm as labor activists more easily than upper-class women prior to the 1930s because they were already present in the economic sphere. Economic necessity required them to work and, hence, to violate the social demands of the time requiring that wealthy White women remain domestic. Being politically active presented no unique violation of gender/sex expectations for the working-class women. As a result, the history of labor activism is full of women leaders: Mary Harris “Mother” Jones (Tonn, 1996), Emma Goldman (Kowal, 1996; Solomon, 1987), Voltairine de Cleyre (Palczewski, 1995), and Lucy Parsons (Horwitz, 1998).

Class affects how gender is performed and how gender/sex is perceived. Men of lower classes face the stereotype that they are less intelligent, immoral, and prone to criminality. Women of lower classes are stereotyped as sexually promiscuous, easily duped, and dependent on state assistance. This discrimination and related stereotypes help maintain oppression (Ehrenreich, 1990), which can be multiplied by oppressions due to racism and sexism.

**Intersectionality Conclusion**

An intersectional approach has many implications for the study of gender. First, intersectionality prevents scholars from falling into a specific type of generalization called essentialism. **Essentialism** is the presumption that all members of a group are alike because they have one quality in common. If researchers study only the fragment of a person called gender or sex, they reduce a person’s complex identity to one dimension. Sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and class also must be considered.

Second, intersectionality recognizes assumptions about gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, and class influence the way individuals view the world and the social realities and inequalities they produce (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). Thus, the study of gender in communication is not about quirks of personality but is about the way broad social patterns privilege some people and disadvantage others. Intersectionality makes clear how oppressions of groups interrelate. Just as any analysis of gender in communication is incomplete without taking one’s intersectional identity into account, so, too, is any analysis of the cultural tools used in power and privilege (Davis, 2008). Educator-consultant Heather Hackman (2012)
explained that one cannot accomplish social justice by addressing one form of oppression in isolation. Oppressions are not independent. A part of the power of oppressions is the ways they intersect, supporting each other.

Third, intersectionality recognizes that all people are labeled with and internalize multiple group identities: “It is not just the marginalized who have a gender, race, and so on” (Harding, 1995, p. 121). Whiteness is part of identity, as is heterosexuality and being a man. People do not always recognize these ingredients because they are considered the norm. So even as intersectionality enables the understanding of complex forms of subordination, it also makes visible how dominant groups have an ethnicity, sex, gender, and class.

Intersectionality renders a more complex, realistic portrayal of individuals’ gendered/sexed experiences. Sociologist Leslie McCall (2005) termed it the “intra-categorical approach to complexity” that “seeks to complicate and use [identity categories] in a more critical way” (p. 1780). Like McCall, we seek to “focus on the process by which [categories of identity] are produced, experienced, reproduced, and resisted in everyday life” (p. 1783). As you explore your own intersectional identity, your list of ingredients can be quite lengthy, including religious or faith affiliation, age, physical and mental abilities, immigration status, marriage status, and region of country. Keep in mind that gender, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national identity, and socioeconomic class influence your perceptions, but they are not innate, permanent, or universal categories.

Intersectionality of identities and oppressions highlights the way cultural identities and inequalities are embedded in political systems and social structures, not only in people. Philosopher Sandra Harding (1995) explained that sexual and racial inequalities “are not caused by prejudice—by individual bad attitudes and false beliefs.” In fact, Harding believed that focusing on “prejudice as the cause of racial (or gender, class, or sexual) inequality tends to lodge responsibility for racism on already economically disadvantaged whites who might hold these beliefs.” It keeps the focus on individuals rather than on the larger culture in which their attitudes were created. Clearly, prejudice does contribute to racism, sexism, and other forms of inequity, but Harding argued that people should view inequalities as “fundamentally a political relationship” that manifests itself through cultural strategies or norms that privilege some groups over others (p. 122).

**Communication**

Communication constructs, maintains, and changes gender/sex. It is how group and individual differences and inequalities are created and sustained. Fortunately, because of its dynamic nature, communication also makes social change possible. For these reasons, it is particularly beneficial to focus on communication when examining gender.

We define communication broadly as a meaning-making process, consistent with a social construction perspective (Gergen, 1994). People are not passive receivers of meanings but are actively engaged in the meaning-making process.
As the title of this book suggests, one of those meanings being continually constructed through and in communication is gender (Taylor, personal correspondence, January 2003). For us, communication is an action (not a reflex). Given gender is communicated, it, too, is an action or something people do.

If we had to summarize the thesis of this entire book in one sentence, it would be this: Communication creates gender, gender does not create communication. Instead of examining how gender influences communication, we explore how communication constrains, perpetuates, stimulates, ignores, and changes gender (Rakow, 1986). We hope to spotlight the profound role communication plays in the construction of gender/sex identities.

Focusing on communication offers important benefits. First, it reminds you that individual gender identities and cultural assumptions about gender change over time. Second, it clarifies that gender does not simply exist on the individual level. Rather, gender is a cultural system or structure of meaning constructed through interactions that govern access to power and resources (Crawford, 1995). Third, it reveals that individuals play an active role in maintaining and/or changing gender constructions.

A communication approach helps prevent essentializing gender because it treats gender as a verb, not a noun. Gender is a process, not a thing or a universal product. Accordingly, in this book we examine how people “do” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) or “perform” (Butler, 1990a) gender. Gender emerges in the seemingly apolitical, routinized daily behaviors you enact in conscious and nonconscious ways. This, however, does not mean that your performance is without gendered intent or goals. Communication is goal driven. Through repeated stylizations such as gender performance, the communication may become automatic, but it is no less strategic (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Kellerman, 1992). We use the word strategic in its broadest sense to refer to how people use components of communication in an attempt to accomplish their multiple, simultaneous interactional goals.

Our reference to cultural systems and structures highlights the point that communication never happens in a void. It always takes place in multiple contexts, including physical, relational, cultural, and temporal. Cultural systems and values play major roles in constructing meanings. Studying gender as a cultural system or structure makes visible how gender is constructed on at least three communication levels covered in this textbook: individual, interpersonal, and societal (Crawford, 1995).

At the individual or intrapersonal communication level, a person develops personal gendered identities. At the interpersonal communication level, people influence each other’s gender identities. At the societal level, social institutions contribute to the construction of gender/sex—both by imposing gender expectations and by liberating persons from them. This is why we dedicate the second half of the textbook to an analysis of the ways in which family, education, work, religion, and media contribute to the construction of gender/sex.

Individuals experience these communication levels simultaneously. For example, rape is an attack on the individual, but it happens in an interpersonal context,
and the reason for the sexual assault, the meaning it is given, and even the laws that define the attack as a crime are gendered. (Note, for example, that not until 2012 did the FBI definition of rape recognize the possibility that men could be raped.) Rape is a crime of gendered and sexual power and domination. It is not a coincidence that women as a group have historically been the most frequent victims of rape, that men as a group have historically been the most frequent aggressors, and that when individual men are the victims, they are emasculated intrapersonally, interpersonally, and culturally. A phrase from the 1960s U.S. women's movement makes the three levels of gender in communication clear: "The personal is political." This maxim explains that what happens to people on a personal level is inherently tied to social norms supported by political social structures, such as norms about masculinity and femininity. In the study of gender/sex, analyses of communication enable close examination of how gender/sex is socially constructed, maintained, and changed.

The most comprehensive way to study gender in communication is to study all three of these levels—individual, interpersonal, and societal. Doing so makes it easier to recognize how the gender/sex norms that influence individual and interpersonal communication also influence the range of rhetorical choices available to people in public contexts. Similarly, the way politicians or popular culture stars communicate in public contexts may influence one's expectations of how people will interact in daily life.

**Systemic Gendered Violence**

You cannot adequately study gender in communication without addressing its dark side: violence, including interpersonal physical and emotional violence as well as structural violence. A full understanding of violence requires an understanding of how it is gendered/sexed (Johnson, 2006). Around the world, violence disproportionately affects women and gender non-conforming people.

Regarding women and girls, a United Nations report, *The World's Women 2015*, found:

In all societies, to varying degrees, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture. . . . In some cases, violence against women can lead to death; about two thirds of the victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide are women, in contrast to all cases of homicide, of which 20 per cent of the victims are women. Whereas other forms of homicide have shown significant declines over time, rates of intimate partner/family-related female homicide have remained relatively stable. (UN Statistics Division, 2015, pp. 139–141)

Women and girls, as a result of living in systems that devalue them, face violence as a result of their sex.
Homosexual people, and people who are gender non-conforming, also are targeted for violence. A 2015 report from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees found:

In addition to “street” violence and other spontaneous attacks in public settings, those perceived as LGBT remain targets of organized abuse, including by religious extremists, paramilitary groups and extreme nationalists. LGBT and gender non-conforming youth are at risk of family and community violence. Lesbians and transgender women are at particular risk because of gender inequality and power relations within families and wider society. Violence motivated by homophobia and transphobia is often particularly brutal, and in some instances characterized by levels of cruelty exceeding that of other hate crimes. (pp. 7–8)

The reality is that regardless of the sex of the victim, masculine men tend to be the perpetrators of violence. Typically, those targeted for violence tend to be gendered feminine (or at least not masculine). The term systemic gendered violence makes clear that across cultures, gender is a predictor of who is likely to be a perpetrator, and who a victim, of violence.

Gendered/sexed violence is institutionalized. Systems or social structures maintain the notion that being violent is a legitimate part of heterosexual masculinity,
whether through war between nations or verbal aggression between individuals. Violence becomes a normalized, accepted behavior for men. Predominant expectations of masculinity tend to enable men to dominate other men, women, children, animals, and their environment. Men’s studies scholar Harry Brod (1987) explained,

Whether learned in gangs, sports, the military, at the hands (often literally) of older males, or in simple acceptance that “boys will be boys” when they fight, attitudes are conveyed to young males ranging from tolerance to approval of violence as an appropriate vehicle for conflict resolution, perhaps even the most manly means of conflict negation. From this perspective, violent men are not deviants or nonconformists; they are overconformists, men who have responded all too fully to a particular aspect of male socialization. (p. 51)

If violence is equated with proving one’s masculinity, it becomes difficult for young men to be nonviolent and maintain their masculinity. Worse yet, society struggles to recognize boys and men as victims of psychological or physical abuse by other men, let alone by women. Men who are victimized are emasculated. Furthermore, when women are violent (e.g., suicide bombers or murdering their spouses or children) society struggles to recognize the acts as violence. They are typically explained as acts of self-defense (Johnson, 2006; Stuart, Moore, Hellmuth, Ransey, & Kahler, 2006), acts of martyrdom, or a form of mental desperation. They are viewed as unusual or unnatural acts for women.

Gendered violence cannot simply be explained by examining an individual person’s violent behaviors. Placing blame only on individual men ignores the social structures that enable and even encourage such behavior. People are taught from an early age to view men’s violence as the natural effect of testosterone. But if the hormone causes aggression, all people with higher levels of testosterone would be violent, and they are not. In actuality, men are socialized to act aggressive to become men. There is a hierarchy of masculinity, and those at the bottom due to factors such as body size, racism, sexual orientation, or classism must work harder to prove their masculinity (Kimmel, 2012b).

Countless social practices contribute to a culture that normalizes the violence committed by many men against others. These practices include the seemingly innocent standard that girls and women should be more polite, ladylike, and willing to smile and that they should take sexist remarks, street calls, and whistles as innocent jokes or flattery (Kramarae, 1992). Those who speak up risk criticism or physical retaliation. Such gendered social practices also include the expectation that all men should be aggressive, sexually active, and unemotional or risk abuse of some kind.

We introduce you to the interconnections between gender/sex and violence in this chapter, but this is only the start of the conversation. Throughout the rest of this book, we return to this theme by exploring, for example, domestic violence in family settings, bullying in educational settings, sexual harassment in work settings, and sexualized violence in media.
Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates why a gender diversity approach is necessary. Gender does not exist in isolation from other identity ingredients, nor does it exist in isolation from social pressures and structures that maintain it. Anthropologist Nancy Henley and communication scholar Cheris Kramarae (1992) explained that “cultural difference does not exist within a political vacuum; rather, the strength of difference, the types of difference, the values applied to different forms, the dominance of certain forms—all are shaped by the context” (p. 40). When two people communicate, there are never just two parties present in the interaction; instead, multiple social groups (ethnicity, class, and gender) are represented, each with varying degrees of privilege and oppression.

Given people’s intersectional identity, it makes sense that there are far more than two gendered styles of communication. And given the intersections of forms of dominance, a study of gender in communication also requires the study of diverse social categories’ relative power. Studying gender diversity in communication calls for an analysis of more than just masculine and feminine styles of communication.

In many ways, this textbook is a “how to” book. It explains how to study gender/sex more than it explains what already has been discovered in gender/sex research (although we do a good bit of that as well). Given that researchers’ understandings and people’s performances of gender/sex continually evolve, it is more important to know how to read, hear, understand, and critique gender in communication than it is to know what has already been discovered. Our goal is not to tell you the way things are, for the state of knowledge changes. Instead, our goal is to teach how to see why things are the way they are. That way, you can consciously choose to embrace that which is liberatory and work against that which denies the full measure of your wonderfully unique, distinct, and idiosyncratic humanity.

KEY CONCEPTS

| androgyny 11 | gender 3 | race 18 |
| aromantic 17 | genderqueer 14 | sex 10 |
| asexual 17 | gender/sex 14 | sexual orientation 17 |
| binary 14 | heteronormativity 17 | socioeconomic class 19 |
| cis 16 | identity 8 | trans 15 |
| communication 21 | intersectionality 8 | transgender 15 |
| essentialism 20 | intersex 13 | normativity 15 |
| ethnicity 18 |
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Identify five key ingredients that make up your intersectional identity. Reflect on how they interact with each other, creating your gender identity. Consider how power relations influence them.

2. What does it mean to “do gender”? In what ways is the study of communication central to the study of gender?

3. In your own life, you do gender. Think of examples where you were rewarded for gendered behavior appropriate to your sex or punished for gendered behavior that did not fit your sex. How did this affect how you do gender?