

Part 1: Social Construction of Gender

Theoretical aspects

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Since its existence, the theory of socialization employs the central question of how people develop individuality and whether or what impact the environment has on this maturation process. The resulting concepts focused on searching how man succeeds in integrating into complex social structures. The starting point was the hypothesis that man is by birth - or better in nature - antisocial and only becomes socially capable through his socialization process (= socialization). A first prominent representative and co-founder of sociology was inter alia the Frenchman Emile DURKHEIM (1858-1917), who helped develop this approach.

His ideas were of scientific importance and were until the end of the 1960s clearly shaped by the assumption that man submits to social demands. Subsequently, concepts about the newly emerging personality and educational theories (Freud, Watson, Piaget) started to impose themselves and considered Durkheim's theory as not comprehensive enough. The focus of this line of research is now being placed increasingly on the development of personality as well as of their individual characteristics. Man is understood more as a "subject", who himself is also actively involved in his biography of socialization.

Until about 50 years ago, the opinion prevailed that the differences between men and women are induced by nature and are biologically grounded. Men are "controlled by reason" and women's behavior is mainly driven "by feelings". Thus, also according to the social research of that time, the difference between the sexes was explained through their behavior. These differences were practically innate according to the former knowledge.

In the late 1960s, especially in the social sciences in the English-speaking world the realization prevailed that the social cultural proportion of the applied gender role is greater than the biological predisposition. In consequence the practiced gender role is not static (= innate), but flexible and changeable. It became increasingly clear that through social learning and interaction, values and norms were being mediated on the gender identity.

1. Theoretical foundations

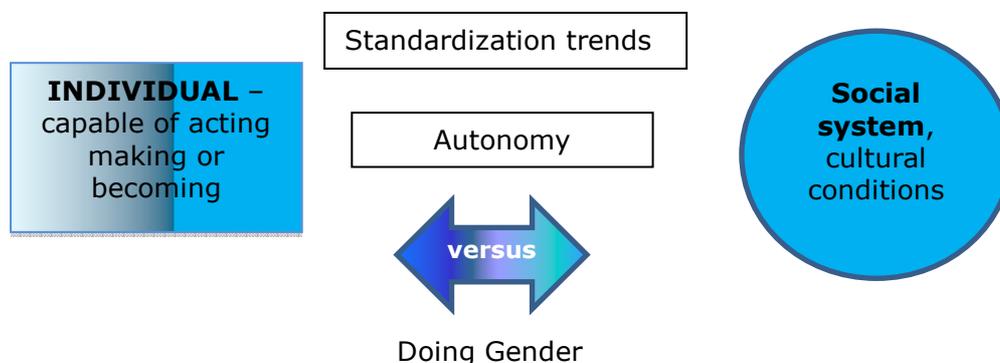
To better capture prevalent gender relations, the current scientific debate in gender research relies on the theory of the culture of bigenderism (Hagemann-White). Here, the term gender is distinguished in two dimensions:

- Biological Gender ("Sex")
- Social Gender ("Gender")

Under "biological sex" are classified all the physical features and developments, related to physique, physiology, morphology, hormones and chromosomes of a human body. In the following, the conceptualization of social gender will be focussed on and for this purpose backgrounds and explanations will be presented.

The central starting point for gender research is the detection and evaluation of the social and cultural imprint. Back in 1968, Simone de Beauvoir commented on the social construction of gender with the famous phrase "One is not born a woman, but made one!". But this attribution process affects not only girls and women, but also boys and men and detects the prevalent gender roles in societies and the accompanying tendencies of standardization and attribution. This is associated with a behavioral expectation explicitly directed to women and men, which provides for both genders assigned characteristics and social positionings- linked to a more or less clearly separated division of labor. Based on the social manufacturing of gender, not only a organization system is assumed, but also a hierarchising system to which both sexes are submitted or assigned.

Currently, gender research assumes that the gender identity development results from an interplay of various factors. The different biological features of girls and boys influences inclinations and interests. A major force in the training of capabilities and skills, remains socialization, which so to speak, is the medium for possibilities and limitations under the culturally predominant exercise of gender roles. With the increasing age of the individual however, an interaction between the systems also arises, because the individual himself (active) increasingly can decide for or affect the adoption or refusal of socially attributed sexual characteristics due to the maturation processes (see chart).



The English professional term "doing gender" implies that the affiliation and identification with one gender, usually occurs as a constant social process and can be found in all human actions.

"Doing Gender" refers to the social application of the differentiation of the sexes and the interactions in which gender is manufactured. But in order to renew the daily allocation of what is female or male over and over again, some "methods" are required. The ability to direct individual action so that the processes carried out match the allocation made, describes the process of "doing gender" (cf. Faulstich-Wieland 2004: 176f.). In general, women and men, boys and girls behave like they think they should.

The socialization process beginning at birth turns out to be the basis for gender allocation. The gender identity is awarded resistance in which, for example, a boy over and over again stages himself as a boy and at the same time also announces his counterpart as belonging to the male sex. Thus a boy not only has a gender, but he proves it and allocates it to others, again and again.

In this process at least two people are constantly involved, a person representing their gender and another that recognizes it accordingly. One's own staging is successful if a girl or a boy, in relation to others, could demonstrate their gender in a credible way. The constant and everyday process of "doing gender" provides the basis for our gender relations to be regarded as (unquestioned) normality, and not as a cultural and social manufacturing and attribution.

However, as the constructivist aspects within the orientations of gender research are different, it is difficult to give a precise description of what is to be interpreted in more detail under gender construction. Their intersection is focused on the complex situation that "nature" and "culture", "sex" and "gender" are recognized as effective factors which are understood as part of a reflexive social practice.

To conclude this section, it should be noted that since the beginning of 1990's - based on a discourse in the U.S. - a Queer theory has been formed, which sees itself as a continuation of the concept "doing gender" and thus as an expansion of gender studies. It deals critically with the deconstruction of sexuality, the aspects of culture in relation to gender and gender roles, and possibly with the resulting conditions of exploitation. Known representatives are: Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick und Michael Warner.

2. Gender specific Socialisation – Backgrounds

The acquisition of gender behaviors has a complex history in which many factors, interactions and social processes are involved. They are manufactured by expectancies, attributions, sanctions and the promotion of certain attitudes and behaviors. A gender-specific socialization is displayed in manifold components: emotional development, socializing, play interests, and so on.

2.1 Agent of socialisation "Family"

Newborns start - in addition to their visible biological sexual characteristics - in this prevailing culture of bigenderism already with the ideas and expectations of their environment. These are also related to their social sexuality. Commonly after the birth of a child, the first central question asked to the parents of the newborn is "What is it?", even before information about eg health is sought. The reassurance of what gender the new child has, helps one's own security in dealing with the newborn . This is how parents connect the birth of a son with different ideas, but also possibly fears than with the birth of a daughter (and vice versa). This attitude creates then usually unconsciously different interaction processes, attributions of behavior, gestures and facial expressions. Boys will be equipped differently (clothes, toys, etc.) than girls. In some cases, this classification process begins prenatally, since for some parents (partly) from the sixth month of pregnancy it is particularly important to know the

sex of their future child in order to make appropriate "preparations". This example shows what kind of not to be underestimated factor these processes of gender attribution possess in our daily lives, albeit often unconsciously.

Already in the first years of life, interactions, symbolization and expectations related to their own respective genders increase. But also girls and boys observe their social environment more and more according to their gender. In our cultural sphere, due to the socially completed allocation of gender-related tasks, it is still common that the majority of women/mothers - especially in the early years of the child – take upon them the care and the education and where fathers pursue the traditional breadwinner model. On the other hand, children also observe their surroundings and relationships and about from the age of two, they are also increasingly aware of their own (biological) gender. This cognitive process then controls also progressively their social-emotional perception. They observe and register how their immediate social circle is constructed related to gender. This is how children experience in their family of origin and through various extra-familial "agents of socialization" (nurseries, kindergartens, preschools, etc.), from friends (peer groups), through picture books, through television, through the participation in public life (shopping, transportation, etc.) and from advertising, as to how the prevailing concept of social gender depicts "womanhood" and "manhood" and respectively what is desirable and undesirable. Through these their own gender-related behavior is regulated specifically through what is viewed as "normal" and what can be described as "atypical".

According to this tendency, traditional rather stereotypically defined expectations and attribution models are usually characterized by polar notions of boy- or girlhood and are (still) current. The following are some exemplary features and attributed capabilities or characteristics:

Boys	Girls
Strong, powerful	Female
Assertive	Soft
Self-consciously social	Take others' needs into consideration
May be aggressive	Should not be aggressive
Intense movement	Controlled activities
Coarse motor skills	Fine motor skills
Competition-oriented	Cooperative
Handling with technology	Dealing with household
Robustly beautiful	Cute
Factual dealing	Emotional handling

Already at kindergarten age, boys and girls know exactly which attributions and perceptions are given regarding their own gender-related behavior. This is also evident in "unconscious" actions in everyday life (eg: Who should fix what? Who gives comfort? A girl does not do that! Boys don't cry!). These hints give them significant knowledge on what are desired gender roles and on the other hand provides them orientation markers for the construction of their own gender identity. Although the differences between the sexes in

this age group are not as pronounced, lived out or displayed, many already have internalized gender-typical behavioral characteristics, hierarchical boundaries and interests.

2.2 Agent of socialization "School"

School as a realm of social interaction is charged with gender dynamics. As girls and boys spend in this community a weighty part of their time, it is an important context for adolescent development in the framework of the negotiation of gender images and gender relations. The secret gender curriculum at (primary) school, shows pupils that not only the education of children is mediated by women, but also that the majority of the staff in charge of their educational learning and at care facilities are mainly female employees.

This situation can be seen as a social reflection that sends different messages to boys and girls: in the upbringing of children, men are only slightly present (and/or have no interest in children), they pass into other - usually not educational - professions where more social recognition and income can be expected. That child-rearing and education is mostly women's business, becomes quickly apparent to both girls and boys! 90% of teachers at German primary schools are female. Current research findings are divided on whether this particular female dominance can lead to "learning disabilities" for boys.

If one follows the assumption made out of gender socialization, that for some of the boys, who are missing male references and relationships in the immediate vicinity (eg. single-parent families, strong professional activities of the father, etc.), the demarcation process of what is feminine in the discovery of their male identity (= The opposite of experienced femininity must be male, if there are hardly any experiences with real masculinity!) is of particular importance for their manhood. Thus, it becomes clear that for this group of boys the above described school setting can pose a challenge for their development. Possibly for these boys, school education will be strongly linked to the experienced female demands in learning, and if then also successful performance are delivered by the majority of girls, this group of boys will connotate school success with femininity and will distinguish their world of poor school performances from the "female" world, this in order to downgrade it (degrading) and on the other hand out of their perspective to become (more) manly (enhancing) (see "Underachievement of Boys", Stamm M.).

It is not until secondary schools, that gender relations at colleges are changing and that at least in the upper level male teachers are numerically equivalent to female teachers.

Until the entry into adolescence, the realms of gender often tend to be strongly separated. As a rule, boys distance themselves from girls and prefer to keep to themselves, while girls prefer also the presence of other girls. All the learning processes taking place in these single-sex peer groups, are of great importance for gender education (See "Agent of socialization "Peer Group" in this article).

A significant interaction with the behavior of girls and boys is also attributed to the intercommunication with teachers. Through their behavior they even contribute an active significance to the process of interaction. The importance of gender and the filling of gender

images are produced and reproduced by the participating teachers. But consequently they are involved in the success or failure of coeducational learning situations as well as in the question whether girls and boys can develop "atypical" interests and can demonstrate appropriate achievements or not.

2.3 Agent of socialization "Peer group"

A central feature of the adolescence of both sexes is that gender differences at this point of development are strongly emphasized and established, but also simultaneously eroticized. The Peer Group assumes with the onset of puberty a central role in the practice of social gender roles patterns and in the coping with developmental tasks. It weakens the influence of family values and contributes to a great extent to the detachment and the evolution of the Self of the individual. Especially in this period of life, the contents and experiences of sexual socialization for both sexes are of great and lasting importance.

Although in recent years social images of masculinity have been increasingly critically questioned in public discussions and have been evaluated, many boys still focus on a desired image of independence and strength, of activity and dominance, which has the composition of a pattern of successful and socially highly valued masculinity (hegemonial masculinities) (see also King / Flaake 2005).

Also during adolescence girls and young women can develop a "second reality" (Streeck-Fischer 1997, p 52): a "cool" one, based on the image of a strong girl's self-presentation, and that covers deep feelings of insecurity and self-doubt.

Just like for most boys the role model of an autonomous and superior masculinity has the essence of a distant principle, which is to be attained if possible, so have social notions of feminine beauty and attractive physicality for most girls the character of an ideal, which they can never satisfy completely. For girls as well, the same-sex peer group in the classroom is of great importance for the exploration and appropriation of gender identities. Just as with boys and young men, the Peer Group is the "central plane mediating social definitions of the "normal", the "correct" and the "attractive" (Faulstich-Wieland 1999, p 99). In contrast to the peer group of boys, the sexual identity in girls groups is however not created by devaluation and exclusion of all that is connoted with the opposite sex. In this respect, - unlike in boys groups -no dominance over the opposite sex is made. Primarily, girls groups seem to be negotiating on different designs of femininity.

Within the framework of these (gender homogeneous) Peer Group processes or its affiliation, developmental tasks for the practice of future gender roles are often dealt with. This can be: relationship to one's own body, closeness and distance to one's own or the other sex, importance of emotions, valuation of the opposite sex, discovery of one's own sexuality and its practice, tolerance of dissimilarities, handling of power and powerlessness, attitude towards violence/oppression.

Umgang mit Macht bzw. Ohnmacht, Einstellung zur Gewalt/Unterdrückung.

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How do the Sexes Perceive their Communicative Behaviour? – Single Sex/Cross Gender

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In the process of sexual identity formation, the self-perception and perception of others, plays a significant role in the context of doing gender. Girls and boys verify their gender role also in social interactions and are on the constant search for answers for personal - but mostly unasked - questions: "What kind of boy do I want to be or embody? What kind of girl do I want to be or embody?" A guide for this is the observation and assessment of the other surrounding teenagers/adults and their behaviour. But also the adjustment to and the confrontation with social traditions as well as with gender stereotyping burdens this clarification process. Thus the search for one's own identity frequently guarantees also uncertainties and fears about their own but also about the opposite sex. Alleged certainties are used in this step to developing their own internal stability, classic reproductions of gender role behaviour are often copied for their own salvation even though these go against personal conceptions of one's self. It is not uncommon for these to cause inner psychological tension and stress in boys and girls. From this perspective, the importance of the peer group in this phase of development moves right to the centre as a significant source of identity creation.

Based on this starting point, it appears interesting and worth knowing, to see how girls and boys perceive and describe themselves in their communicative action and in their social representation.

To get a bit closer to these findings and to obtain authentic statements, six girls as well as six boys in the age of 14 and 15 as part of single sex groups were interviewed.

This round of questions took place on two consecutive days (group of girls / group of boys from one class) during a break (20 min) at school. The responses of the young people were recorded in writing.

The aim of this single-sex group interviews was to better know and understand the perceptions and assessments as being part of their own sex or the opposite sex group - based on communicative behaviour. In addition to the self-assessment of one's own gender behaviour, the cross gender perspective was also in focus of this survey. The results of this way of interviewing are not representative, but can only reflect the tendency of a limited opinion of young people in this age spectrum.

The key questions of both surveys concerned the perception of gender-related communicative behaviour:

Question 1: "How do you see the communication amongst yourselves (Boys/Girls)?"

(= single sex)

Answers of the boys group to question 1 (self-assessment):

"If something is wrong, the conflict does not last for three weeks among us!"

- "Rational" - "A dispute among boys is taken casually!" - "Boys are more monosyllabic." - "But there are also chatterboxes among us!" - "We can apologize faster!" - "We do not need to tell everyone everything!" - "Issues and relationships are not displayed so publicly!" - "Super! Outstanding!" - "Funny, but not lame!" - "Many are cool, but not everyone!" - "We do not beat around the bush, we come to the point faster!"

Answers of the girls group to question 1 (self-assessment):

"Smaller groups as boys." - "Externally, girls are nice to each other, but internally there can be some strife!" - "Strict rule: Possessive → a girlfriend." - "Rather unforgiving in conflicts." - "Girls go rather shopping."

Question 2: "How do you see the communication with girls or boys?" (= cross gender)

Answers of the boys group to question 2 (cross gender):

"If they are stressed out, they have to bitch about it!" - "Hysterical!" - "Talk a lot! More than boys!" - "Short messages come with little hearts!" - "Talk mostly about trivial issues." - "Feel at ease when they are in a group." - "Positive/negative things presented larger than they are, dramatization!" - "Exclusion is also possible among girls, bullying, too!" - "Being bullied is much more about appearance but also about behavior!" - "We do not understand how girls think!" - "They can be annoying." - "If everything is fine: kiss here, kiss there!" - "Girls praise one another, when one's wearing new shoes!"

Answers of the girls group to question 2 (cross gender):

"Are no longer as violent as they used to be!" - "Various behaviors, they are not all the same!" - "Bit superficial." - "Friendly mobbing." - "Boys talk about something (like photo's, material, soccer)." - "Don't talk about personal things, but only about general boys' stuff." - "They rather do something together, they talk less to each other!" - "They rather at in larger groups, you hardly see them by themselves!" - "Not able to think about themselves in a group, they more likely do that when alone!" - "More dependant!" - "They got something stuck in their ears."

Through this overview of answers given by the girls and boys, it is clear on the one hand how gender-stereotypical experiences are formulated and on the other hand also how heterogeneity is perceived, so that all equally (have to) to adapt to existing stereotypes. It is an unmistakable fact that girls and boys in times of vulnerable gender identity during adolescence and in order to "save" their own personality, fall back on stereotypical and traditional role contents, most likely to give as little public space as possible to their own uncertainty ("How do I want to be?"). The constant desire for social acceptance and group membership as well as the search for their own individuality leaves the youngsters - at least when they informally meet in group publicly - return to these behaviors.

Against this background, the traditional gender attributions, dramatizations and self perceptions of adolescents are better understood. Communication occurs out of the boys or girls point of view rather by contradistinction to "You behave yourself female/male!" and "We boys/girls behave just the same like boys/girls!". This also creates confidence in dealing with and in the encounter with each other. The players can usually rely on the fact

that, negotiations about gender behavior, define their spaces of action and provides their encounters social certainty in dealing with one another.

In the course of this manageable form of interviewing, it became evident that the girls and boys gave this subject a lot of activity and participation. Perhaps this is an indication that the issue of "social gender" also represents fundamental learning material for classroom activities. In the well-known "hidden curriculum" in schools, the subject is already at the front ranks.