

# What is gender identity?

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



The human body is amazing. And even though there are many researchers that conduct studies on human anatomy, there are so many questions that are unanswered still to this day. But what we do know has helped many people and continues to benefit certain theories that have been made over many centuries. One part of the human body that has lots of answered and unanswered questions is gender identity. There are many factors when it comes to gender identity. Some people think simply: Men act as men, women act as women, and man to be with woman.

It has been thought to be the “right way” for many centuries. But people are all different and to think that one way is the right way would be a misunderstanding of how the body works and what can happen to the human body if something is out of tune. Gender identity can be defined as a person’s inner sense of being male or female. Gender identity is believed to be developed during early childhood and an effect of how the child was brought up by parents and societal influences. When the child reaches puberty, the influences are reinforced by hormones. Is gender identity a result of nature or nurture?

What are the biological factors that play a role in gender identity? What is the difference between how the male and female develop? Does nature or nurture play a bigger role in gender identity? This will all be discussed later on in this essay, along with some of the arguments about sexual identity and how evidence from biopsychology may help resolve these arguments. There are many roles that play a part in sexual differentiation, as well as gender identity. Some of those roles are tied to biological factors or nature and yet others may be linked to environmental influences or nurture.

It is impossible to know all the details, but we do know a great deal of how the body of a male versus the body of a female. The role of biological factors is largely dependent on hormones in the body system, as well as genes, gonads, chromosomes, and anatomy. During childhood, levels of circulating gonadal hormones are low, reproductive organs are immature, and males and females differ little in general appearance (Pinel 2009). When a child reaches puberty, the body makes significant changes. These changes can be seen and even heard, but these changes are also different in a boy than in a girl.

While both male and female have many similarities, both also have many differences within the body. The differences in chromosomes and hormones are what completes the natural evolution of a child into an adult and ultimately decides whether the sex of a person is male or female at birth. When speaking of hormones, most people will think of testosterone for men and estrogens for women. But in fact, women produce testosterone and men produce estrogen. The difference is the ratio in which the body produces these two types of hormones.

Men produce more testosterone and women produce more estrogen. There are many differences like the example above in the bodies of male and female. Increases in the release of gonadotropic hormone and adrenocorticotrophic hormone cause the gonads and adrenal cortex to increase their release of gonadal and adrenal hormones, which in turn initiate the maturation of the genitals and the development of secondary sex characteristics (Pinel 2009). Along with biological roles, it is also believed

that the environment surrounding of a person may be a factor of gender identity.

Some of these nurture factors include one's self-concept, social and political attitudes, and perceptions and relationships about other people. Family, peers, schooling, religious training, mass media, and popular culture are just a few of the agents through which gender socialization happens (Crossman, 2012). Through this evaluation, making a conclusion on which has more of an influence on gender identity, nature or nurture, is a hard decision to make. Reading and hearing of stories of people's gender identity crisis has a pull towards nature, but nurture still has a big role in gender identity as well.

Gender identity shapes how we think about others and ourselves and also influences our behaviors (Crossman, 2012). For example, gender differences exist in the likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse, violent behavior, depression, and aggressive driving. Gender identity also has an especially strong effect on our feelings about our appearance and our body image, especially for females (Crossman, 2012). Each of these can be linked both to biological and environment factors. The story that may have the most evident factor is the story of the twin that lost his penis.

After losing his penis to a circumcision procedure, the doctor advised the parents to let doctors perform a surgery in which they castrate the boy and create an artificial vagina, and raising the boy as a female. The parents agreed, but it would later prove that their child was not acting or wanting to act as a girl. In fact, the child wanted to do things that a normal man would

do and took no interest in any female activities, like playing with dolls. Even with treatment, the child still developed as a man would.

When approached with an estrogen regimen at the age of twelve, the child refused not liking the changes of the estrogen. At fourteen, the now teenager decided to live as a male. Shortly after, the twin's father decided to share the truth with his son. Now the kid could have an identity not only of himself but of his gender. He requested androgen treatment and surgery that would remove the breast and create a penis. The man regained use of his new penis with the help of androgen treatment, but was never able to reproduce children of his own.

In the end, the doctors and parents could not change how the boy felt on the inside. Just how much influence does nurture have on gender identity? It could just depend on the situation in itself. There are many arguments that surround gender identity. Theorists have come up with their own opinions and views regarding gender and the why gender inequality exist.

Functionalist theorists argue that men fill instrumental roles in society while women fill expressive roles, which works to the benefit of society (Crossman, 2012).

Further, it is our socialization into prescribed roles that is the driving force behind gender inequality. For example, these theorists see wage inequalities as the result of choices women make, which involve family roles that compete with their work roles (Crossman, 2012). Symbolic interactionists look at gender from the micro perspective and examine gender stratification on a day-to-day level. For example, men are more likely to interrupt women

in conversations and their workspaces generally reflect greater power. These theorists also focus on how gender roles are internalized by males and females (Crossman, 2012).

Conflict theorists view women as disadvantaged because of power inequalities between women and men that are built into the social structure. For example, from this viewpoint, wage inequalities that exist between men and women result from men's historic power to devalue women's work and benefit as a group from the services that women's labor provides (Crossman, 2012). Feminist theory emerged out of the women's movement and aims to understand the position of women in society for the sole purpose of improving their position in society.

There are four major frameworks that have developed out of feminist theory: liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, and multiracial feminism. People will always have their own opinion about gender (Crossman, 2012). There may never be a way to solve these arguments, not until there is scientific proof or people can decide on which opinion they believe is all true. Gender identity is one's sense of being male or female. Both biological (nature) factors and environment (nurture) influences play roles in both sexual differentiation and gender identity.

Hormones are the biggest biological factor and the biggest environment influence is how one is brought up in their childhood. During the evaluation, I have thought about nature being more of a factor when it comes to gender identity, but have come to the conclusion that it may depend on the situation of a person. Through the years of research, many people have argued over

gender identity and gender inequality. Theorists have formed many opinions surrounding gender identity and unless there is some kind of scientific proof the argument may continue.

## **References**

1. Pinel, J. P. J. (2009). Biopsychology (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
2. Crossman, A. (2012). About. com. Retrieved from <http://sociology.about.com/od/Disciplines/a/Sociology-Of-Gender.htm>