

# Gender roles in society

[Sociology](#), [Gender Studies](#)



In a society where gender norms have been set for many years, there are still an increasing number of people that go against it. Although it is more accepted than what it once was, there are still many criticisms of those that oppose gender norms. It is prevalent in sports today, as society stereotypes genders on what sport they can or cannot play. Sports such as football, wrestling, and other rough, physical games are viewed as manly sports, while hobbies such as shopping, cheerleading, or gardening are seen as feminine. There has been a time where I have witnessed an individual cross the boundary of gender norms, with negative consequences. In our society, there are certain characteristics and qualities that define masculinity and femininity, but there are occasionally those who display traits of the other gender. A guy in my grade tried out for the cheerleading squad in our sophomore year of high school. This was the first time a male has tried out for the squad, and he was bashed for it. The guys called him gay while the girls were surprised that a boy would ever attempt to join the cheerleading squad. Why was a thing like this such a new-worthy and shocking event? It is because it goes against gender norms, and is different from what people are used to seeing. We have been raised and conditioned to believe what the rest of society believes, and it happens to be that cheerleading is meant for girls. The girls cheer on the guys who competitively play a sport such as football or basketball. Our society deemed women inferior to men, and it still shows today in cases such as this, as you do not see male cheerleaders cheering for women participating in sports. This is considered inappropriate of gender norms because a male cheerleader is seen as feminine for the traits that cheerleaders require, such as enthusiasm, support for athletes,

and liveliness. The cheerleaders perform stunts and exercises that require nimbleness and flexibility, things that most guys usually do not possess. Women have really gotten into sports such as cheerleading, figure skating, and gymnastics and these have been deemed acceptable for women, since they are smaller, slower, and weaker. In Aaron Devor's short essay *Becoming Members of Society: Learning the Social Meanings of Gender*, he talks about how children begin to learn the basics of gender and gender identity, and the basic behaviors and attitudes of each gender. He states that children learn of gender at a young age and develop a sense of who's a boy and who's a girl. He then talks about masculine and feminine behavior, and what attributes are most commonly linked to masculinity and femininity. He then states that "both males and females are popularly thought to be able to do many of the same things, but most activities are divided into suitable and unsuitable categories for each gender class" (Devor 144). This shows that women are clearly capable of playing any sport that men play, and vice versa. Even through this, many things in our society are simply not accepted culturally and socially for whatever reason. The sport of cheerleading is not seen as masculine; therefore men should not be playing it. Men should only do masculine things while women should only do things considered feminine. Children also grow up learning gender norms from family, friends, and media. When the children go to a playground to play, one rarely sees a girl playing football with the guys or a guy playing jump rope with the girls. Even through early childhood, kids learn what is socially acceptable and what is not. In Claire M. Renzetti and Daniel J. Curran's short essay *From Women, Men and Society*, they talk about how factors such as parents, toys, and peer

groups affect gender socialization for kids. There are few differences between boys and girls at birth yet parents still treat their babies differently, starting with the clothing (Renzetti and Curran, 466). Clothing both encourages and discourages children to act a certain way or participate in certain activities. In investigating early peer group socializations, Renzetti and Curran observe how kids segregate themselves. " Observations of young children at play show that they voluntarily segregate themselves into same-sex groups" (Renzetti and Curran, 475). Kids do this because they are more comfortable with their own gender, thinking that hanging out with people that are similar to them will give them comfort and familiarity. Same sex peers are one of the things children look at and follow with, more so than advice from parents and teachers. Children want to be liked by others, and that means sticking to the rules and following the gender norms of society. As they grow older, these gender socializations stick with them. There was a case a while ago that involved two twin boys, with one of them having his penis cut off by accident when he was born. Both the parents and doctors were puzzled as they had no idea what to do. John Money, a psychologist, informed them that the best route to choose was to raise and treat their son like a girl. He was sure that this would work, claiming that it was nurture, not nature, that made the child the way he/she was. The boy's name was changed to Brenda, and for the first few years, everything was working out fine. Money's hypothesis was seen as a success, and he was acclaimed for it. There were a few critics, such as Milton Diamond, who was wary of sex change upbringings. Later on, when Brenda went through the stages of puberty, things took a turn for the worse. She was going through a hard time

and was very unhappy. Girls called her names such as "caveman", and she had no friends. With this, Brenda's parents told her the truth, and upon hearing it, later changed back to a boy. Money made excuses and reasons of why this did not work, such as Brenda having an identical twin brother, and that the parents might have been in shock while raising her. In a study done by Swaab, he found that the hypothalamus was noticeably bigger in males than in females. This is a contributing factor of why nature may ultimately be greater than nurture. All of these previous examples show proof of how our society creates gender norms. Children at young ages develop a sense of gender qualities, along with what is considered masculine and what is considered feminine. In example, parents find it normal when their young boy asks for a truck or a train set, but find it odd when he asks for a doll or a tea set. As they grow and develop, this attained knowledge carries on and affects the choices they make as teens and adults. Such is the case of the guy trying out for the cheerleading squad, as he knows that what he is doing is uncommon and usually frowned upon, but still does it anyway. This could be for many reasons, such as the parents not enforcing gender norms, or the simple fact that he may just really want to be a cheerleader. There's also the fact that parents dress and treat their kids differently according to their gender. The clothing and the toys parents buy their children unknowingly affect how they perceive gender. This could lead them to believe things such as how guys should not cheerlead and how girls should not play football. The study done by Swaab to some extent disproves the theory that gender is created and learned, as the hypothalamus is larger in men than in women. The saying that gender is created by nurture can be argued since there was

a case of a boy who was raised as a girl due to a medical accident, which backfired in the end. It can be said that a boy/girl is born with a set of traits and qualities that cannot be learned or taught. Gender can be constructed without us knowing it. As young individuals, we are taught how we should dress, talk, act, and behave based on our given sex. This discourages people to cross these boundaries of gender norms and really do what they please, for the consequences and criticisms they may receive. We act the way we do because we are taught to, and it is ideal in our society for men to act masculine and women to act feminine. Any deviation from this norm brings about negative comments and harsh criticism. People who dare to actually resist expectations of gender generally have a tough time since they are different and unique from the rest of society, while someone who conforms is just like everyone else. In a society where diversity is accepted and welcomed, gender norms are set and viewed as something that should not be changed from what is in place.