FOUNDATIONS

1

1 DEVELOPING A CRITICAL GENDER/SEX LENS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Explain why a gender diversity perspective is more useful than a sex differences approach to studying gender in communication.

1.2 Define intersectionality and describe the connections between the following ingredients: gender, sex, sexuality, romantic attraction, race/ethnicity, national identity, and socioeconomic class.

1.3 Understand how communication structures people's perception of gender/sex.

1.4 Identify the ways violence is gendered.

Gender structures people's understanding of themselves and each other. **Gender** refers to the characteristics, behaviors, and appearances a society dictates a person of a particular sex should perform. 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?"

- 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"?

● What is the purpose of a "gender reveal" party that uses pink or blue to announce the sex of the child the parents are expecting?

At the moment of birth (before, if sex assignment happens *in vitro*), people differentiate children on the basis of sex and begin to communicate gendered expectations with clothing, activities, interactions, and colors (pink or blue) (Zosuls et al., 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 spreads it globally.

● Sex-based color assignments did not appear until the early 1900s. When first assigned, the generally accepted rule was pink for boys and blue for girls. 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 exactly 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 a cultural choice 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 Lynda R. Willer (2001) made this clear in an analysis of "welcome baby" greeting cards, noting cards "represent a means of sending intentional and unintentional messages about gender roles" (p. 21). Thus, to study gender in communication, you need to study not only how gendered bodies communicate but also how gender is constructed through communication.

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.

Over a decade ago, 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 emerged supported by questionable data that human beings are born with "brains in pink and blue" (p. 10), a claim we will explore more in the next chapter. This social myth creates a self-fulfilling prophecy to which parents and teachers contribute when they communicate about and with children differently based on their sex. Instead of pink and blue brains, it is better to recognize that brains are mosaics: "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" (Rivers & Barnett, 2011, p. 2). We look past popular media depictions and delve into scholarship on gender complexity in this textbook.

GENDER DIVERSITY IN COMMUNICATION (INSTEAD OF SEX DIFFERENCES)

Although the predominant culture continues to assume that women and men are different and, therefore, communicate in different ways, scholarly 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 & Kyratzis, 2014; Hyde, 2005, 2007; Mare & Waldron, 2006; Ye & Palomares, 2013). Many other factors affect behavior, such as social roles, ethnicity, individual differences, and the 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, 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 sex-linked communication 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 (heterosexual people, men, whites) while others are marginalized and subordinated (gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, queer people, women, people of color, and anyone who does not fit the male/female binary). 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 sex 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* provided 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. We embrace a gender diversity rather than sex differences approach. 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. Instead of providing focus, it places blinders on our vision. 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.

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. Diverse communication styles exist; it is not just that women use a different communication style than men.

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. The problem is, if you start from the assumption that women and men communicate differently, then you tend to see only differences between them rather than the extensive similarities (Dindia, 2006) and you fail to recognize the differences between women and between men.

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.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Gender and sex are woven throughout a person's identity and are axes along which social power is organized. 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, sexual orientation, religion, nationality; and contextual role identities—for example, friend, lover, student, supervisor, community member. A person's identity has multiple interacting and sometimes contradicting facets (Krøløkke & 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 nurse 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).

Thus, 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). No woman is ever just a woman. No man is ever just a man. No person is ever just their sex. Gender is messy.

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 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 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 experiences 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.

You cannot understand sex and gender if you do not also consider race and class. Author Audre Lorde (1984) offered a description of how an intersectional approach is necessary to fully accept your own identity and understand your social location:

> 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. (emphasis added, 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, chocolate, 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 infused 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. Similarly, power and oppression do not operate along a single axis; multiple ingredients inflect diverse forms of oppressions and subordinations.

Because identity ingredients intersect, you cannot understand how a person does gender unless you also consider how that person's gender, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national identity, religion, 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 found at the intersection of race and sex. Crenshaw's insights allowed scholars to articulate how identity ingredients "build on each other and work together" in a way that rejects "either/or binary thinking" and embraces the "both/and frame" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 4). The interactions of ingredients matter. For a thorough explanation of the concept, watch Crenshaw's 2016 TED Talk titled "The Urgency of Intersectionality."

Intersectionality as a theory of identity prevents reducing complex identities down to a single ingredient. You cannot use an individual identity ingredient to explain why a person acts in a particular way. Additionally, 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 et al., 2013, p. 922). With this overarching understanding of intersectionality, we now turn to a consideration of the ingredients that form identity and power.

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, nonbinary), while *gender* refers to the social expectations attached to how particular bodies should act and appear and, thus, is socially constructed (e.g., feminine, masculine, androgynous, etc.). 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 emotional, a caretaker, sensitive, compassionate, revealingly (or concealingly) dressed. Masculine attributes are 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.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Gender Continuum

feminine   masculine

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, people could be both masculine and feminine in varying proportions (see Figure 1.1).

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 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 *gyne* 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 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Gender Diversity

high masculine

androgynous

high feminine   low feminine

undifferentiated
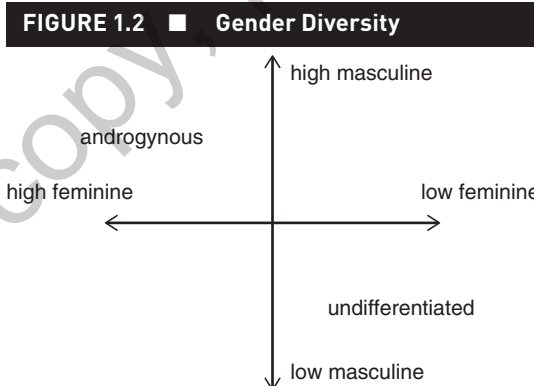
low masculine

Now, people talk not just about one form of femininity and one form of masculinity, but about feminini*ties* and masculini*ties*. Many ways to be feminine and masculine exist, and many ways exist to express gender that are neither masculine nor feminine. For example, the specificity of one type of masculinity is noted by W. Kamau Bell's (comic and host of *United Shades of America*) reflection on how, during public school, they were made fun of because "I wasn't being a black man in the right way" (as cited in Gross, 2017). Lore LeMaster et al. (2019) invite people to think of gender as a galaxy. Just as there are billions of galaxies, there are billions of gender potentialities, and within each galaxy, there are trillions of stars or unique contextual gender performances and choices (p. 353).

Although focusing on gender instead of sex was meant to be a step away from over-generalizing people's identities based on their sex, masculinity and femininity persist as ways to prescribe how men and women are supposed to behave (Crawford & Fox, 2007). Because of this, some 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. Craig Gingrich-Philbrook (1998) compared masculinity to Santa Claus, saying, "masculinity may not be natural, but it nonetheless motivates a range of cultural expressions" (p. 218). 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 using an instrument like the Bem SRI. 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 argues 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 *con*texts 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 sex 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—and perhaps even more" (p. 21). If language names only two sexes (he or she), 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, experts indicate between 1.7% to 2% of the population is born intersex (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 55; Blackless et al., 2000), which is about the same percentage as those who are born with red hair.

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 would be surgically altered to fit the assigned sex of male or female (Pasterski et al., 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 interse[x]" (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.

Slowly, though, law is beginning to recognize people who do not fit the binary. In 2017, a judge in Oregon granted a video-game designer's petition to be *agender*, a legal designation that is neither male nor female (O'Hara, 2017), and in 2021, the United States started issuing passports with an X designation for intersex, nonbinary, and other non-conforming people (Price, 2021).

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, transgende*[*r*], *femme, butch, boi, neutrois, androgyne, bi-* or *tri-gender, third gender*, and even *geek*" (p. 3).

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 1.3).

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Screenshot From *Lloyd in Space* (https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=MvIpiGLAK9k)

Source: Lloyd in Space. Disney.

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 screenshot 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. Whom Zoit's crushes on does not define their sex.

We understand 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 *any*one becomes

woman, and... *every*one'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. 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. 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) and the recognition of multiple masculinities and multiple femininities. 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.

Just as a multiplicity of genders has been recognized beyond the binary masculine and feminine so, too, have a multiplicity of sexes been recognized. To name the sexes/genders beyond the binary of male/masculine and female/feminine, an expanded vocabulary has been developed: transgender, trans, nonbinary, genderqueer.

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). Their gender identity and expression does not match the gender tied to the sex they were assigned at birth. 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; and/or

surgically alter their bodies or not.

To be clear, some trans people operate within the binary: they are male or female. Others do not and are nonbinary. However, some people who are nonbinary do not consider themselves trans. **Nonbinary** simply refers to people who do not accept the binary categories of masculine/male or feminine/female. Regardless, *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.

Cisheteronormativity names one form of normativity that assumes all people are heterosexual and **cis**, meaning a person's gender self-identity and gender expression match the sex they were assigned at birth. **Heteronormativity** describes how social institutions and policies reinforce the presumption that people are heterosexual and that gender and sex are natural binaries (Kitzinger, 2005). The way culture communicates about sexual orientation constructs and maintains the sex/gender binary and maintains heteronormativity (Rich, 1980).

Normativity is not neutral; it legitimizes violence in a variety of forms. LeMaster et al. (2019) outlined four forms of violence that cisheteronormativity justifies and that, in turn, maintain cisheteronormativity: external violence, internalized violence, discursive violence, and institutional violence. *External violence* includes physical anti-queer harassment. *Internalized violence* occurs when queer people experience "self-hatred and self-destructive thoughts and behavioral patterns." *Discursive violence* refers to forms of communication that label as pathological or deviant those who are non-normative.

Institutional violence refers to laws, policies, and procedures that discourage and criminal-
ize non-normativity (p. 346–347).

The violence of cisheteronormativity is illustrated by the cultural disciplining of
transgender persons. 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." This was
an example of both institutional violence (psychiatry as an institution) and discursive vio-
lence. The label of *disorder*, in turn, legitimized the use of external violence by some people
who physically attacked those whom they perceived to be non-normative. The label of
disorder was also used for individuals with gay, lesbian, or bisexual sexual orientations, and
some practitioners attempted to alter the individuals' gender identities. This may have led
some people to internalize the condemnation and begin to hate themselves.

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 mat-
ter 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 intro-
duced 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). *Cissexism* is a term that names "the belief that transsexuals' identified genders are
inferior to, or less authentic than, those of cissexuals" (Serano, 2016, p. 12). Although cis-
sexism puts a name to the discrimination transexual people face, the term *cis* can reinforce
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. Discursive violence needed to be countered.

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 singu-
lar 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 and reinforce cisnormativity.

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: gay men and lesbians. However, because of the discursive violence attached to the term *homosexual* that we described earlier, it is better to use the terms *lesbian, gay,* or *bisexual*. *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. In 2021, *Cosmopolitan* magazine included a photo gallery of celebrities who identified themselves as pansexual. The list includes actors Madison Bailey, Cara Delevingne, and Janelle Monáe; model Tess Holliday; drag queen Courtney Act; and singers Kesha, Sia, Brendon Urie, Brooke Candy, Kehlani, and Miley Cyrus (Gilmour, 2021).

Like words identifying sex and gender, a copia of terms now exists referring to sexuality. If more than two sexes exist, it makes sense that terms for sexuality are needed that are not bound to a sex binary. Examining sites like *OKCupid* and *Tumblr,* Australian social scientist Rob Cover (2019) noted how young people on digital media have added "more than one hundred nuanced sexual and gender labels, such as heteroflexible, bigender, non-binary, asexual, sapiosexual, demisexual, ciswoman, antiboy, transcurious, and many more" (p. 602).

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 a romantic relationship (Bogaert, 2015).

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 cis-normativity, 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). Race is socially constructed and "not a biological fact" (Nell Irvin Painter as cited in Biewen, 2017).

Society holds on to the idea 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. The central position of whiteness in 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 as a category. Researchers have found that white people 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.

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. We include country allegiance to make clear nationality is not just a legal status but also a "dynamic and dialogic" identity that has been communicatively constructed. It is a "matrix," composed of "images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices" (Edensor, 2002, p. 17).

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 gentile 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 affects 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 how 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. Intersectional analysis is necessary to understand a person's gender performance, interpersonal interactions, group dynamics, and organizational structures. Intersectionality makes evident 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.

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).

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 or 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 "intracategorical 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.

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 essential to focus on communication when examining gender.

We define **communication** broadly as a meaning-making process. 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—and do to each other.

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.

Focusing on communication offers important benefits.

1) It reminds you that individual gender identities and cultural assumptions about gender change over time.

2) 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).

3) 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.

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 celebrities 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 institutional and 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 2020*, found the following:

Women throughout the world are subjected to physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, regardless of their income, age or education, oftentimes leading to long-term physical, mental and emotional health problems. Around one third of women

worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner; and 18% have experienced such violence in the past 12 months.

Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence, peaking during women's reproductive years in both developed and developing countries.... In addition to intimate partner violence, women and girls are subjected to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence by non-partners, including people known to them. In the most extreme cases, violence against women can lead to death: globally, an estimated 137 women are killed by a member of their own family every day. (United Nations, 2020)

Women and girls, as a result of living in systems that devalue them, face violence as a result of their sex. (See Figure 1.4 for United States specific statistics)

FIGURE 1.4   ■   Prevalence of Sexual Harassment and Assault in the United States

Graph 1: Prevalence of Sexual Harassment and Assault in the United States
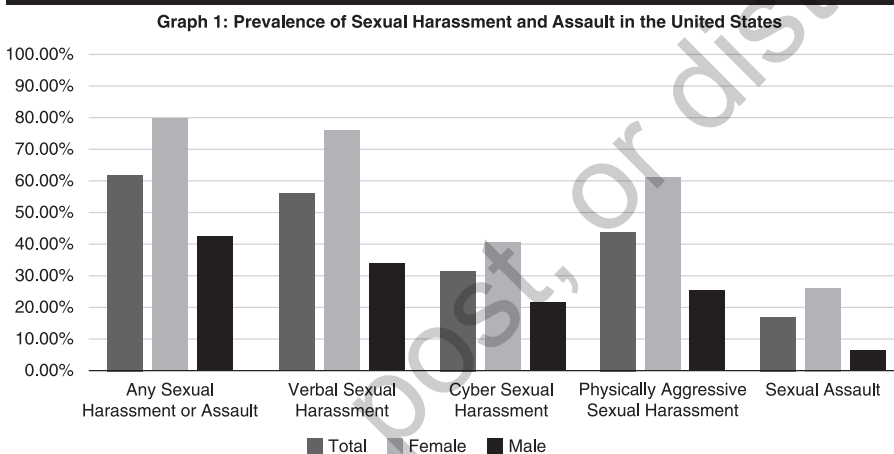
Total Sample and by Gender (N = 2,009)   *2018 SSH Study*

Source: Stop Street Harassment (2018), The facts behind the #MeToo movement: A national study on sexual harassment and assault. https://stopstreetharassment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Full-Report-2018-National-Study-on-Sexual-Harassment-and-Assault.pdf

Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and people who are gender non-conforming also are targeted for violence. A 2020 study by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law found LGBT people are nearly four times more likely than non-LGBT people to experience violent victimization, including rape, sexual assault, and aggravated or simple assault (Flores et al., 2020). The Human Rights Campaign (2021) marked 2020 as the most violent year on record for transgender and non-conforming people, identifying 44 violent fatal incidents.

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/sex 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 *non*conformists; they are *over*conformists, 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.

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. Some claim men's violence is 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 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 peer ridicule.

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. Gender in communication should explore femininit*ies* and masculinit*ies* and genders that are both and neither. 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 (p. 10)

aromantic (p. 17)

asexual (p. 17)

binary (p. 12)

cis (p. 15)

communication (p. 21)

essentialism (p. 20)

ethnicity (p. 18)

gender (p. 3)

genderqueer (p. 12)

gender/sex (p. 14)

heteronormativity (p. 15)

identity (p. 7)

intersectionality (p. 7)

intersex (p. 12)

nonbinary (p. 15)

normativity (p. 15)

race (p. 18)

sex (p. 9)

sexual orientation (p. 17)

socioeconomic class (p. 19)

trans (p. 14)

transgender (p. 14)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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

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?