

What constitutes gender in our society? Does it even truly matter? Physical gender (sex) and gender identity are very different concepts in today's society. Things are slowly progressing and the gender identity in American culture isn't being as closely linked to gender as previously. Both genders are involved with this change, but women have made greater leaps in defying the rules of gender identity.

Gender identity is socially constructed, physical gender is genetically determined. Before one can see gender as being socially constructed it is important to look at it from its roots in genetics. From the beginning of human time gender has existed, but gender identity has only been recognized since it was seen as a deviation from gender. Genetics give men more potential for physical strength and naturally larger size. Character traits such as aggression and dominance may also be related to this. In hunter-gatherer societies it was important for the physical gender and the gender identity to match to facilitate survival. In this primitive time humans were still very similar to other animals in our reliance upon the environment and the natural requirement to defend themselves against other things in nature. The early gender identity and physical gender associations were essential, but now we are in a more "civilized society" where it isn't an issue of survival anymore. If it isn't an issue of survival anymore, then why is changing gender identities such a problem for society as a whole? Mostly I feel that it is an issue of reluctance to change that affects most humans. Feminist movements didn't begin in any great magnitude until less than 300 years ago. With these movements for women receiving the right to own property (instead of being property), participate in society, vote and being able to work the entire idea of what a woman "is" changed. The quote on the web page provided could provide a clue as to why this transition happened so slowly, "men have always been afraid women could get along without them". Men being as dominant as they are would be opening vulnerability in their established position to allow women to become their equals. At the time each of these movements and changes occurred they were viewed as simply changing the way women could act, what no one could foresee was that these were mild precursors to the shake-ups in gender that were to come. In the late twentieth century medical technology took gender identity to a new level. Humans discovered how to change hormone patterns and allow themselves to float between genders in a little over a year. This discovery blurred all gender lines and made all assumptions about physical gender (and therefore the physical gender associations) irrelevant.

Even though it has become irrelevant logically, socially the association between gender and gender identity is still important and it is expected that the consistency exists. Because of the expectations most people follow the expectations and those who don't are seen as abnormal. In recent times men have begun taking care of more household duties and women have ventured out into the working world. This is not seen as abnormal in these times, but backward practices of men being paid more than women for the same job still exist. In some Native American cultures gender identities are ignored and it is perfectly acceptable for men to handle what would be thought of as a woman's role and vice-versa. Physical gender and gender identity are no longer the same.

Family and society's idea of gender are directly related in most cases. When family and society's idea about gender don't match non-acceptance of the deviating family can result. In the fictional Male Pregnancy website provides an interesting insight of the reaction that could be received if men were able to cross one of the final barriers of their gender identity. The fictional forum has three sections, each matching with the expected reaction of society, "I am appalled", "I am thrilled" and "I want to be a pregnant man". These basic reactions exist with nearly all changes in gender identity (substitute "be a pregnant man" for the name of the identity change). Such a dramatic change in the family such as a male becoming pregnant would likely result in a complete role reversal. In this example it is likely that Mr. Lee would be the primary care giver to the child and his significant other (if any) would likely be working. More realistic examples of the reflection of society's ideas in family would be things like the prohibition of married women working in the 1930s. Because of the macro society impact of the laws the micro effect was that women were at home with their families. While it appears that in the more modern times that women have been able to become more independent, according to one of the linked articles the amount working women are respected has declined. The article states that stay-at-home women are respected more. I personally know several women who stayed at home with children for a few years, went to work for a few years and then decided to return home to take care of their children and grandchildren. My aunt is one such woman and she frequently states how much more rewarding it is for her to be able to take care of her grandchildren than to be working for other people. Increased respect and increased satisfaction could be a major factor for many women to stay at home and perform the duties within their traditional gender identity. Family influences gender roles through influencing children from birth to act like their gender, there is also influence on older family members by necessity. When children are first conceived parents are frequently anxious to know the physical gender of their child so that they may

begin planning the child's room and other things for the child's life that will affect gender identity. On the side of necessity for the change of gender roles, this is more infrequent, but at some point typically occurs in a lot of families. If for some reason the female role holders of a family were unable to handle duties such as cooking and maintaining the house it is likely that male role holders who had never done those tasks before would be forced into performing them. In American society gender has a large impact on the experience in the family. In modern times it is far more likely that girls will be denied permission to go on dates by their parents (primarily the father), but at the same time the boys of the family will be pushed to start dating. The female gender identity places the girls as being weaker and unable to defend themselves in a relationship, while the male gender identity all but requires the boys to actively seek out mates as early and aggressively as possible. Gender identity is a firmly established concept in families and is unlikely to change in the near future.

Females are more often the topic of gender conversation because they are typically seen as the weak and oppressed gender. Because of the classic dominance of men they are more able to move freely in their gender identity, but females are restricted to acting within the female gender identity. Women are the ones who have been required to fight for rights and freedoms. Women didn't originally have the right to vote, the ability to work and are more likely to be abused in a relationship. Women have been oppressed for centuries and therefore are the gender that must fight to receive the rights entitled to them. Men have always found themselves in a position of power, which means that women are not. For the most part men have been static throughout the ages, but women have begun to change and move beyond what is thought to be "their place" in society. Women are involved with the discussion of gender from the family point of view because women have always represented the family, women are the bearers of children, and therefore essential to the family process. Women have made great progress in changing their gender identity.

Gender is a very complicated topic. Physical gender and gender identity in our society are changing greatly from each other. Gender is extremely debatable and will likely never be as clear cut in the future as it was in the past.