questioning identity: gender, class, ethnicity

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This chapter is about questions of identity. Identity itself seems to be about a question, ‘who am I?’ We are going to focus on three key questions:

- How are identities formed?
- How much control do we have in shaping our own identities?
- Are there particularly uncertainties about identity in the contemporary UK?

First, we need to think a bit more about what we mean by identity.

### 1.1 What is identity?

If identity provides us with the means of answering the question ‘who am I?’ it might appear to be about personality; the sort of person I am. That is only part of the story. Identity is different from personality in important respects. We may share personality traits with other people, but sharing an identity suggests some active engagement on our part. We choose to identify with a particular identity or group. Sometimes we have more choice than others. This chapter will address the relative importance of structures, the forces beyond our control which shape our identities, and agency, the degree of control which we ourselves can exert over who we are. Personality describes qualities individuals may have, such as being outgoing or shy, internal characteristics, but identity requires some element of choice. For example, I may go to football matches on Saturdays because I enjoy shouting loudly with a crowd of lively extroverts, but I go to watch Sheffield Wednesday because I want to identify with that particular team, to wear that scarf and make a statement about who I am, and, of course, because I want to state that I support one Sheffield team and not the other (Sheffield United). We may be characterized by having personality traits, but we have to identify with – that is, actively take up – an identity.

This example also illustrates the importance of marking oneself as having the same identity as one group of people and a different one from others. Think about a situation where you meet someone for the first time and, in trying to find out who they are, ask questions about where they come from and what they do. In such situations we are trying to find out what makes up this person and also what makes them the same as us – that is, what we have in common – and what makes them different. If you see somebody wearing the badge of an organization to which you also belong, it marks that person out as being the same as you, as sharing an identity. Or consider a situation where, travelling abroad, hearing the voices of those who speak your own...
language, you feel both a sense of recognition and of belonging. In a strange
place, finding people who share our language provides us with something
and someone with whom we can identify. Or imagine that you are on a train,
and a stranger in the compartment is reading the local newspaper from the
town where you were born. You might strike up a conversation which
includes references to what you have in common. This presents a moment of
recognition and of having something in common with another person who
shares an identity with you. Identity is marked by similarity, that is of the
people like us, and by difference, of those who are not. There are other
eamples which are less reassuring, where the appropriate identity is not
established, and where, for example, one may be denied access to credit or
purchase, pension or sickness benefits, or entry to a club or restaurant,
or even more significantly, to a country.

How do we know which people are the same as us? What information do we
use to categorize others and ourselves? In the examples above, what is often
important is a symbol, like a badge, a team scarf, a newspaper, the language
we speak, or perhaps the clothes we wear. Sometimes it is obvious. A badge
can be a clear public statement that we identify with a particular group.
Sometimes it is more subtle, but symbols and representations are important in
marking the ways in which we share identities with some people and
distinguish ourselves as different from others.

In this sense, although as individuals we have to take up identities actively,
those identities are necessarily the product of the society in which we live and
our relationship with others. Identity provides a link between individuals and
the world in which they live. Identity combines how I see myself and how
others see me. Identity involves the internal and the subjective, and the external.
It is a socially recognized position, recognized by others, not just by me.

However, how I see myself and how others see me do not always fit. For
example, individuals may view themselves as high achievers, worthy of
promotion, yet be viewed by their employer as less than successful. The
young people noisily returning home from a club in the early hours of the
morning may be seen by others as troublemakers. Think about some of the
ways in which how you see yourself may be at variance with others’
perception of you. This could be at a more personal level, in the context of
family and friendship relationships, or at a more public or even global level,
where particular characteristics are attributed to specific national or ethnic
groups. A sense of conflicting identities may result from the tensions between
having to be a student, a parent, and an employee at the same time: these are
eamples of the multiple identities which people have.

The link between myself and others is not only indicated by the connection
between how I see myself and how other people see me, but also by the
connection between what I want to be and the influences, pressures and
opportunities which are available. Material, social and physical constraints
prevent us from successfully presenting ourselves in some identity positions –
constraints which include the perceptions of others. Criminal identities are
often produced through the exaggeration of stereotyping, where newspaper reports reproduce the notion of a criminal identity as young, male and black (Mooney et al., 2000). Criminality can be produced by others who construct this category of person. This process of stereotyping certain groups as criminal also illustrates some of the imbalances and inequalities in the relationship between the individual and the world outside.

The subject, 'I' or 'we' in the identity equation, involves some element of choice, however limited. The concept of identity encompasses some notion of human agency; an idea that we can have some control in constructing our own identities. There are, of course, constraints which may lie in the external world, where material and social factors may limit the degree of agency which individuals may have. Lack of material resources severely limits the opportunities we have, as we will consider in the case of poverty and economic constraints in Chapter 3. It is impossible to have an identity as a successful career woman if one is without a job and if there are no employment opportunities. Other limitations to our autonomy may reside within us, for example in the bodies which we inhabit, as illustrated by the ageing process, by physical impairments, illness and the actual size and shape of our bodies.

Identity involves:
- a link between the personal and the social;
- some active engagement by those who take up identities;
- being the same as some people and different from others, as indicated by symbols and representations;
- a tension between how much control I have in constructing my identities and how much control or constraint is exercised over me.

Let us start with an example of an individual and his identity which illustrates the link between the personal and the social. The social scientist Madan Sarup uses the example of his passport, which gives information about his identity in an official sense. Our passports name, describe and place us. A passport describes an individual; it names one person. It also states to which group, in particular which nation, that person belongs:

I have three passports, all British ... In the first one, I am a young man with a lot of hair and a confident smile. My height is 5ft 8in and I am a school teacher. In my second passport photograph, most of the hair has gone. I have a white beard and a serious expression. My height is now 1.73 metres and I am a college lecturer. In the
third passport, the smaller red one, I am bald. Again I have a serious expression, but
now my face is heavily lined. A friend asks: which is the real you? Of course, people
see me in many different ways ... I want to have a closer look at my red passport ...
At the top are the words 'European community' ... The passport refers to my
nationality – British Citizen.
(Sarup, 1996, p.xiv)

Three passports offer details about identities, which are different, yet each
belongs to the same person. Physical appearance is important, but it changes
over time. Sarup’s friend asks, ‘which is the real you?’ This suggests that there
is not only continuity in the name of the person who possesses the passports,
but that there might be a fixed, true, ‘real’ identity which could be uncovered.
The personal identity of the named person includes their experience and life
story. Continuity is important to our understanding of who we are, but
changes suggest that identities are not fixed and constant; they change too.

We have some information here about what Sarup looks like. At one level
physical appearance is how we ‘read’ people when we meet them. The body is
also an important component of personal identity. Sarup cites physical
appearance as the principal example of what is revealed here, but there are
many other aspects of the body which have an impact on identity. Size, shape,
disability, sex, all influence our experience of who we are and who we can be.

A passport picks out other key aspects of identity, which include occupation,
nationality and age, all of which position us and give us a place in the society
in which we live. However, it does not say anything about how we occupy
these positions or about what they mean to us. We do not know how Sarup
himself feels. Passport details cannot reveal a person’s feelings. We need more
information:

I think of [British Citizenship] as a formal categor/ because it does not express how
I feel about it. I am not proud to be ‘British’; it reminds me of the scars of
imperialism, the days of the Raj. I feel more sympathetic to being a citizen of the
European Community, but here too I feel ambivalent. I would rather be a citizen of a federal European Community, but friends remind me that the concept of the 'Fortress Europe' is a Euro-centric strategy to maintain the power and privilege of the 'First World'.

(Sarup, 1996, p.xv)

Here Sarup suggests that he identifies more actively with being a European than a British citizen. To identify with a nation or group like this is to take up a collective identity. However, only one UK identity is offered by the passport. I notice that my own passport gives my place of birth, in Wales, but currently calls me a British and not a Welsh citizen. That Britain is a multi-ethnic, multicultural society is not acknowledged here either. Sarup refers to the colonial past which positions him in a particular relationship with 'Britishness'. This history is not recognized in the passport. The British Empire, however, used to have a place, with the old blue passport which referred to 'The United Kingdom of Great Britain and her Colonies', but the more recent EC and the new EU passports have no place for multi-ethnicity as yet. Those who hold the UK passport are grouped together as if we share one British identity. What we have in common is that we do not have another national identity (unless we have dual citizenship). We are not French or Chinese nationals. Identity is thus also marked by difference; that is, by indicating what we are not. We shall return to the importance of nation in the creation of identities in Chapter 4.

The very fact of having a passport at all confers identity. Particular passports provide rights of citizenship which are denied those who do not possess a passport at all. The passport illustrates some of the ways in which identities are institutionally constructed, and in this case the UK state, through legislation, plays a very powerful part in defining the identities of its citizens, especially in making some identities possible and others impossible. In the UK, birth has to be registered in order for the child to exist officially at all. Birth certificates, like death certificates, require that the person be classified as female or male. There is no alternative or scope for negotiation. At present, whatever an individual does in life to change their gender identity, the death certificate has to accord with the birth certificate, which cannot be changed retrospectively. Other examples of the official production and classification of an identity include ID cards, credit cards, membership cards, driving licences or any other sort of licence.

**Activity 1.1**

Think about your own passport or any other identity card or official document. What does it say about you? Does it suggest groups with whom you share an identity and those from whom you are different? Does this suggest several different identities? What is omitted? What is the importance of such institutional identities?
CHAPTER I QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY

COMMENT

The kind of information revealed in an official document like a passport has many omissions about what identities and allegiances may be important in our daily lives. Fortunately, the state does not expose our political allegiances, community involvement, sexuality or status as a parent, although these also combine to produce our identities. The apparently single identity of citizenship leaves out all the contradictions about who we are and the multiplicity of identities each of us has.

Institutions like the state do have the power to restrict individual or collective freedom to adopt some identities. We probably do not think about these restrictions nor about national identity or citizenship very often, except when we are denied the rights associated with citizenship.

SUMMARY

- The passport example illustrates the tension between how I see myself and how I am seen by others, between the personal and the social.
- Institutions such as the state play an important role in constructing identities.
- Difference is very clearly marked in relation to national identity.
- Such official categories contain omissions and cannot fully accommodate the personal investment we have in our identities, nor the multiple identities we have.

In the next section we explore some of the ways in which social science can clarify some of the definitions of identity which have been offered and begin to address some of the questions which have been asked.

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT CAN SOCIAL SCIENCE TELL US?

In Sections 1 and 2, I argued that identity possessed the following characteristics:

- It links how I see myself and how others see me.
- It links the individual and the social.
- It is marked by similarity and difference.
- It involves some active engagement on our part and a tension between human agency and social structures.
- There are single and multiple identities.
- Identities can be seen as fixed or fluid and changing.

In this section we return to the definition of identity and ask how social scientists have attempted to address these two questions:

How are identities formed?
How much control do we have in the construction of our identities?

3.1 Imagining ourselves

The work of the social philosopher George Herbert Mead, published in the 1930s, has been extensively used in thinking about identity because he offered useful insights into the link between how we see ourselves and the ability of human beings to imagine how others might see us (Mead, 1934). Mead focuses on the processes that are involved in linking the internal and the external. Think about it this way. Imagine that you have an interview for a job. You think about the interview before the ‘big day’ and consider what to wear. You want to look smart but perhaps that new suit would be too hot and you would end up feeling, and looking, very uncomfortable, especially if the heating was turned up high. Maybe you should try not to look too formal? What is going on here? In order to make the decision about what to wear you have to imagine yourself, to look at yourself from the outside. We have to think about how others see us and to be self-conscious. Mead argued that it is the capacity to imagine how others would see us and our capacity to carry images in our heads which is an important distinguishing feature of human beings. For Mead, identities are produced in a social context, but through individuals thinking about what links them to the social world. We do this, he argued, through symbolizing. This is best illustrated in our use of language, where words operate as symbols. Pictures, images and gestures are also symbolic in that they too represent something else. A symbol stands for something else. For example, the word ‘table’ stands for the object which we call a table. Having the word allows us to talk and think about the object, namely the table, even when there is no table within view. The suit worn at the interview in the scenario above signifies or stands for the serious candidate. We symbolize the sort of person we want others to think we are through the clothes we wear and the ways in which we behave. In the interview example we have an image of ourselves at the interview, either in the disastrous overheated scenario or preferably in another more confident, successful scene where we might visualize ourselves appropriately dressed and getting the job.

Symbols and representations are important in the production of identities. This is how we signal our identities to others and how we know which people we identify with and those who are distinguished as being different. How we speak, the clothes we wear, badges, scarves, uniforms or flags all offer symbols of identity.
symbols of identity. Judith Williamson, whose work focuses on representational systems, writing within the discipline of cultural studies, describes the process of choosing an identity in the following way:

When I rummage through my wardrobe in the morning I am not merely faced with the choice of what to wear. I am faced with the choice of images: the difference between a smart suit and a pair of overalls, a leather skirt and a cotton skirt, is not one of fabric and style, but one of identity. You know perfectly well that you will be seen differently for the whole day, depending on what you put on; you will appear as a particular kind of woman with one particular identity which excludes others. The black leather skirt rather rules out girlish innocence, oily overalls tend to exclude sophistication ... often I have wished I could put them all on together — just to say, 'how dare you think any of these is me. But also, see, I can be all of them'.

(Williamson, 1986, p.91)

Williamson suggests that we can choose the image that we present to others. She assumes that we have a choice, and that we know other people will understand our choices. In different cultures, these clothes, for example, would be interpreted in very different ways.

How does this develop our understanding of identity? Considering the claim that identity involves how I see myself and how others see me has led to some suggestions about how this takes place. First, we have to be able to imagine ourselves, to reflect on who we are and how we appear to others. Second, we do this through symbolizing, through producing images and visualizing ourselves. The ability to visualize ourselves and to represent ourselves gives us some degree of agency, although the repertoire of symbols upon which we can draw is always limited by the particular culture which we inhabit, as illustrated in the quotation from Williamson. This approach to the notion of identity puts more emphasis on the control which individuals have, rather than the constraints which they experience.

- In constructing identities we imagine ourselves.
- We do this by visualizing ourselves, thinking in symbols.
- Who I am is dependent on how I am seen by others as well as how I see myself.

In addressing the question about how identities are formed we have focused on the processes which are involved in constructing an identity within the individual; what happens in the social situation is left out. What else do we need to know? What happens when people present themselves to others, in everyday interaction?
3.2 Everyday interaction

Erving Goffman, the sociologist whose work has been very influential in sociology and social psychology, focused on analysis of everyday interaction, conversations and encounters. How do we communicate with others? Goffman suggested that how we present ourselves to others was rather like acting out a part in a play where the scripts are already written. In the work which we discuss here he refers to roles not to identities, but his focus on the detail of everyday interaction is also useful in exploring how we understand the identities of others and how we present ourselves. He based his work on a theatrical metaphor. He states in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) that his perspective on the self is dramaturgical – that is, based on the idea of a performance. What we are is not given (that is, there already), it must be created. We act out in a whole range of different roles which are rather like parts in a play. Actors in a play cannot act out any old part and say what they like. They have to speak the lines written. However, even if the roles are written we can improvise and interpret our roles, although there are constraints.

Individuals, like actors, are performing for an audience. Speech, acts and gestures all require someone else to be watching or listening. The parts we play may be already written but we bring our own expectations and interpretations to these roles. We have to be convincing in order to persuade others in the audience that this is an authentic part that we are playing. For example, as a student you have to persuade your tutor that this is a serious role – that you are really a student. How do you do this? Perhaps you ensure that you submit your assignments on time, look earnest, carry piles of books around with you and deny any involvement in late-night party-going? The bank manager, the teacher or the doctor; each has to give a performance which convinces others of their authenticity. This is not quite the same as investing in an identity – that is, having personal commitment to an identity – but it does give us more detail about how we ‘read’ people and about how we get the message about ‘who they are’.

A society like the contemporary UK offers a whole range of social roles which we as individuals can take up. Stop and think for a moment about the number of such positions that you occupy – in your home life, in familial relationships, at work, as a consumer, as a citizen, as a client of the welfare state or social or medical services. This involves a combination of our own expectations about a role and those of the society in which we live.

Not all of our actions in these scenarios are conscious or explicit. Sometimes we give information to other people directly. In these instances Goffman describes the public display which we intend to make when we give information as front stage. Appearance, clothes and gestures are crucial in the presentation of self, but sometimes the information presented may inadvertently reveal something unintended or unintentionally is given as a confident performance which is all the while driven by an impression of being accurate.

The focus of Goffman’s ideas about answers to questions about roles and to the relationship between people. Goffman’s ideas about identities formed in the society in which we play in that social role written. However, the parts we play in that society can be improvised.

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There are some key points to consider:
- All performances are social.
- Information can give an impression of who you are.

What is the source of our identity? It is not necessarily consciously intended in a theatrical presentation, but it is often not conscious and is manifested in the way we present ourselves.

3.3 The unconscious

What mechanisms of the unconscious influence our identities? Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis is helpful in understanding how unconscious thoughts and feelings are passed into everyday life. However, the unconscious is not just a place for repressed thoughts and feelings, it is also a place for the personal unconscious.
inadvertently reveal more about a person than the information directly or intentionally given. We give off information which we do not quite intend; for example, the nervous interview candidate who twists his fingers unintentionally is giving off an impression of anxiety whilst attempting to give a confident performance. The friend who is trying to look interested but who is all the while drumming her fingers and looking around may be giving off an impression of boredom.

The focus of Goffman's work is on everyday interactions. It offers us more ideas about answers to our first question at the beginning of Section 3: how are identities formed? His emphasis is on the social dimensions of identity and the relationship between identity, with its concern with personal investment, and roles which tells us more about the social aspects and social exchanges between people. Goffman's approach suggests that there are links between the society in which we live and the limitations offered by the roles or parts we play in that society, because the scripts have, in a sense, already been written. However, there is also scope for agency because those who play the parts can improvise and offer their own interpretation.

There are some important features of Goffman's original theory which contribute to our understanding of identity and which offer more detail about how identities are presented in linking the personal and the social:
- All performances are addressed to an audience.
- Information can be given intentionally or given off, where we might reveal things unintentionally.

What is the source of the information which is given off, revealed without our consciously intending to do so? Identity relies upon a conscious, active presentation, but it might also involve thoughts and feelings about which we might not be conscious. Unintentional signs, 'slips of the tongue' are manifestations of the unconscious mind.

3.3 The unconscious

What mechanisms, of which we might not be consciously aware, determine our identities? Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory gives us some ways in which to answer this question. One of the major contributions of Freudian psychoanalysis is his understanding of the unconscious, an idea which has passed into everyday language in Western societies through popular culture, the advertising industry and through psychoanalytically inspired practices like therapy. Think about the language in problem pages or used on television in the personal confession programmes on daytime TV.

Unconscious
The unconscious mind is the repository of repressed feelings and desires – often from childhood. These feelings can emerge, for example, in dreams. They can influence the choices we make in later life.
You may be familiar with the idea of *Freudian slips*, when the word we actually say is not the word we intended, which reveals something about our hidden desires. There may be occasions on which you have said one thing when you meant another and what you have said has been embarrassing or humorous. I can think of an example from a handwritten essay where the student wrote ‘of coffee’ instead of ‘of course’, suggesting that it might have been time for a break! Another wrote ‘sexy’ instead of ‘sexist’ in an essay on gender, which might indicate other preoccupations in the unconscious mind rather than feminist critiques of social institutions. Freud argued that these slips along with jokes and dreams can reveal our ‘true’ feelings.

The unconscious is separate from the conscious mind and has its own rules and its own language. Freud argued, based on case studies of people he had analysed, that through early development children repress all their anti-social needs and wants, all the things a child is not allowed to do or to have. This repressed material enters the unconscious and, although it cannot be directly accessed by the conscious mind, is revealed in dreams or slips of the tongue (see Bocock, 1983). Who we are is not given in advance, we are not born with an identity, but it emerges in a number of different forms through a series of identifications which combine and emerge in an infinite number of forms so there is never one fixed, coherent identity but several in play.

You will recall that in the definition of identity in Section 1.1 it was suggested that we have to identify with an identity – that is, actively engage with a position. It is not enough to be classified by someone else, we have to take it up ourselves; for example, identify with a political party or a social movement or with enthusiasts for a type of music. Identification is a term often associated with psychoanalysis. Identification does not just involve copying; it involves taking that identity into yourself. Freud focused on male children and suggests that the little boy is especially interested in his father, although he loves his mother. He wants to grow up like his father and to take his place.

Psychoanalysis is one of the social theories which is organized around a concern with sex, sexuality and gender. In Freud’s approach, children are seen as having sexual desires of a diverse kind. Some of these desires are repressed into the unconscious. Freud argued that the most important psychological drive is sexuality. By sexuality he meant a broad category of pleasure-seeking desires which are experienced even by newborn babies, who, for example, derive pleasure from sucking. If a child’s needs are met in
In infancy, the child is more likely to develop into an adult with a positive outlook on life, whereas the child whose needs are not met will grow up with a pessimistic, negative disposition.

Not only did Freud argue that children were sexual but also that the most significant aspect of development was psycho-sexual. Identification with the parent of the same sex was vital for the satisfactory development of the child into adulthood. This has implications for our exploration of identity. Freud's focus on the unconscious adds to our understanding of the processes at work in the formation of identities. It suggests that we bring childhood experiences, even those about which we are not conscious, to the decisions we make as adults. This might suggest that we have limited control over the identities which we take up. They may be determined by this early childhood experience. However, Freud argues that we may be able to exercise more agency through coming to an understanding of those things which we have repressed into our unconscious minds from childhood experience, notably through therapy which can help us to understand ourselves.

The importance of psychoanalytic theory for our investigation of identity can be summarized as follows:

- The identity positions which we take up may be the result of unconscious feelings which we may try to rationalize but which we do not know for sure.
- Many aspects of identity derive from childhood experience so that identity is constructed by the past as well as through the present.
- Identity is not fixed and unchanging, but the result of a series of conflicts and of different identifications.
- Both gender and sexuality are important to our understanding of identity. Our sense of who we are is most significantly linked to our awareness of our identities as women or as men.

**Structure and agency in Section 3**

Section 3 has focused on the question of how identities are formed and some of the processes which are involved when people take up identities and present these to other people. As we have seen, identity presents a link between the personal – that is, individuals taking up identities – and the social – that is, the social situations in which people find themselves, including social roles, everyday interactions with others and the language which we use. These accounts of identity formation offer different emphases on the role of individuals in shaping their own identities. How do these accounts address our second question?

How much control do we have in shaping our own identities?
Table 1.1 illustrates how each of the approaches discussed in Section 3 addresses this question. Each involves an interrelationship between agency and structure, but some offer more scope for agency.

**TABLE 1.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Structure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mead</td>
<td>Visualization, symbolization, imagination of individuals. We have autonomy in imagining ourselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goffman</td>
<td>Negotiation of roles; we can interpret the parts we play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freud</td>
<td>Individuals can come to understand their childhood experience and shape their own identities. Identities are never completely fixed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We have to use existing language and symbols.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The parts or scripts have already been written for the roles we play.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social forces can operate through the unconscious, which shapes our identities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4 LINKING THE PERSONAL AND THE SOCIAL**

Identity presents the interface between the personal – what is going on inside our heads, how we as individuals feel about who we are – and the social – the societies in which we live and the social, cultural and economic factors which shape experience and make it possible for people to take up some identities and render others inaccessible or impossible. In this section, we look at other views of how identities are formed, continuing to address our first question, but shifting the emphasis on to the social aspect of the identity equation, so that we can begin to consider the third question about uncertainty and about how identities change. In order to explore the possibility that there might be some uncertainties about who we are in the contemporary UK, we need to look in more detail at the relationship between changing social structures and changing identities.

**4.1 Hey you! Who me? Interpellation**

What happens when individuals take up a particular identity position? You will recall that in the earlier discussion in Section 3.1 we considered the importance of symbolization and the ways in which human beings can imagine themselves occupying a particular identity. What is actually
happening when we imagine ourselves as the successful candidate, the streetwise teenager or the sporting hero? Why do some identities 'work' so that we are drawn into them?

One important attempt to resolve the problem of where the individual stands in relation to socially constructed and even determined identity positions was developed by Louis Althusser who argued that when people are recruited into identity positions they are interpellated or hailed (Althusser, 1971).

It works like this. Imagine that you are walking down the street and someone calls out your name. You stop, turn round and think 'that's me, they're calling me'. Althusser argued that this is how we come to feel that an identity is the one which fits us – as a member of a religious community, as a New Labour voter, as a lad, as a mother, as a 'new man', as a European. The process is one of recognition, of looking at yourself and thinking 'that's me'. Advertising offers plenty of opportunities to think about how this works. Let me show

Interpellation
A process whereby people recognize themselves in a particular identity and think 'that's me'.

![Figure 1.2 Domestic bliss: the appeal of home life (when 'gay' had a different meaning)](image-url)
you an example of how some women, as mothers, might have felt 'yes that's me' in the 1950s and more recently. In the 1950s, women's magazines encouraged women, who might have worked outside the home during the wartime, to return to their domestic duties. Women were actively recruited into being housewives and mothers. Some might have felt that was the sort of mother they wanted to be, and that they fitted this identity. Women's magazines at this time sought to both promote this notion of motherhood and to enable their readers to identify with it (see Figure 1.2).

Such promotions were used in the 1950s to encourage women back into the home and into domesticity. This example illustrates a maternal identity at a particular moment in history. By the late 1990s a rather different maternal identity was being presented and, if the figures for women's participation in the labour market and the sale of women's magazines are to be believed, this is an identity which had purchase at this time (see Figure 1.3). By 1999, mothers might have been more likely to be 'hailed' by the pregnant woman in the workplace than by images of domestic bliss. Advertisements in women's magazines at this time plug into mothers' concerns with juggling paid work and child care.

Advertisements present us with commodities which are promoted as part of a lifestyle. Consumers can purchase symbols of the identities that they want to possess.

Can you think of examples of such advertisements which seek to interpellate the consumer in particular ways? Those for cars, for example? What sort of associations are you expected to make? Would buying a particular model of car make you seem successful, sexy, modern?

Next time you see advertisements on television or in newspapers or magazines, think about the identities which you are being invited to adopt by association.

- Interpellation links the individual to the social.
- It may work consciously or unconsciously.
The work of social scientists which has been considered so far has given us more information about the processes whereby identities are formed. Some of the views discussed focused on the individual and on the details of social interaction rather than the broader picture of social structures which might constraining us. Althusser's work sought to link the individual and the social and to show how some social structures work to recruit people into identities. What can social science tell us about the ways in which these structural aspects of society shape our identities? What are these social structures? Are some more important than others? Are they changing?

4.2 Social structures: concepts and explanations

At this point, I am going to shift the emphasis from personal identity in the context of everyday situations to some of the social structures, such as occupation, nation, and gender, which I suggested in Section 2 were significant influences on identity. How do social scientists explain these structures? I picked out work, gender and nation, ethnicity and place as being useful examples. Each of the remaining chapters of this book focuses on one of these aspects of identity but they are introduced here to signpost what follows and to offer some preliminary discussion of the concepts which are used.

One of the ways in which social scientists have attempted to explain work-based identities is to relate them to class. Social class is used by social scientists as a means of classifying the economic and social divisions of a society. Different economic systems create social class groupings, which involve some degree of inequality. Chapter 3 offers a fuller discussion of different analyses of class, but it is included here as an important factor influencing the life chances and identities of those who share a class position. The unequal distribution of material resources is a key feature of class division.

Another source of inequality can be found in gender relations (gender and identity are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2). There are areas of the labour market and of domestic work, including unpaid caring work within the home, which are seen as 'men's work' or 'women's work'. In industrial societies, paid work is exchanged for remuneration and is hence more valued and has higher status than unpaid domestic work or caring work. The former has been seen as masculine and the latter as feminine. This has been enacted in most Western societies through the notion of a male breadwinner which is primary to a man's identity, whereas women's work has been seen as an extension of their roles as wives and mothers and thus as a secondary activity.

This indicates the importance of gender as part of the organization of a society and not just a part of each individual's experience. It is part of the
The culture of a society. Assumptions about what is appropriate for women and for men can shape and influence our identities and the scope which we have for deciding both ‘who we are’ and ‘who we want to be’.

National identity is an important part of the culture of a society. Think back to the example of the passport, in Section 2. It highlighted the importance of place, of where we come from and of institutional constructions of citizenship. The passport was proof of British citizenship but obscured gender and ethnic differences. Rights of citizenship can provide people with either considerable freedom or with restraint. Not only were women not accorded the same voting rights as men in the UK until 1928, but other rights, for example to welfare benefits, have depended on gender. The rights conferred by citizenship are often gender-related. In the UK, rights to civil citizenship have depended on gender because historically the main criterion for citizenship has been independence, based mainly on economic status. Carole Pateman argues that:

men, but not women, have been seen as possessing the capacities required of ‘individuals’, ‘workers’ and ‘citizens’ through the dichotomy breadwinner/housewife and the masculine meaning of independence. A ‘worker’ became a man who has an economically dependent wife to take care of his daily needs and look after his home and children ...

(Pateman, 1992, p.228)

The purpose of this example about gendered citizenship here is to illustrate the importance of gender in the construction of identities like those of the worker and the citizen, and to stress the importance of these different interrelated aspects of social organization.

- The organization of society is important in shaping our identities.
- Class, gender, ethnicity and place are important dimensions of identity.
- These factors illustrate the tension between the individual and the social and between the individual’s control or agency and that of social structures.

In Section 3 we briefly examined some of the explanations and concepts which social science offers in response to the two questions posed at the start: How are identities formed? How much control can we exercise over the construction of our identities? The discussion in Section 4 focused on the relationship between individuals and social structures. Changing social structures – for example, changing gender roles, patterns of employment, changing class and ethnic composition of the UK – might mean different identities are becoming available and others are disappearing. What sort of social changes have taken place in the last 50 years? In the next section we look more carefully at the changing times.
Identity and gender

Jennifer Gove and Stuart Watt

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we are going to focus on an important dimension of identity, gender, and look at two significant claims about the way identity is constructed. First, we are going to investigate Kath Woodward's claim in the previous chapter, that gender identities are shaped by many different factors: individual and collective; biological and social. We are going to suggest that gender illuminates the complex multiple origins and practices of identity very clearly, because it allows us to explore our capacity for agency, and the social and biological structures that constrain our freedom to choose our gender identities.

In practice, biological and social differences between women and men are sufficiently important that we often use different words to describe them. This distinction between sex and gender is sometimes a very useful tool in the social sciences, because it allows us to concentrate on social differences between women and men, without worrying too much about biological differences. The problem with this distinction is that often biological and social influences are very tangled. Woodward's passport example clearly shows this tangling.

Official documents do not actually use the word 'gender'; they use the word 'sex' instead, and everyone is categorized as either male or female. Many official documents, such as passports, birth certificates and death certificates, record sex explicitly. Many social scientists prefer to use the term gender to describe this area of difference, as it encompasses cultural and social practices and the bodies we inhabit. The use of the word gender suggests interconnections between culture and the body, rather than asserting a distinct separation between sex and gender, which is difficult and unrealistic to sustain.

Our second claim is that the way we construct our identities is strongly influenced by a set of often rather stereotypically feminine and masculine characteristics and traits that we often associate with gender categories, with women and with men. But women and men are not each made from a single mould. There are many different kinds of women and men, and different traits may apply to some more than to others. Behind the apparent simplicity of two genders, there is a diversity of gender characteristics, and many different influences are at work.

All societies have ways of differentiating between women and men, and between femininity and masculinity. These differences are often expressed through stereotypical language, through words which are associated with women and with men. The activity which follows includes some examples of this kind of language.

ACTIVITY 2.1

Let's look at some of these stereotypical characteristics. Table 2.1 contains 45 different terms which might be used to describe people. Which, if any, of these words would you apply to yourself?
Reflect on the terms that you have chosen, and what they say about your identity.
Do you think you are typically masculine or feminine?

**Activity 2.1** Some words that could be typical of one gender or another

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tender</th>
<th>Arrogant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Jealous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modest</td>
<td>Commanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>Unpretentious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Decisive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfriendly</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>Tidy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playful</td>
<td>Robust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemotional</td>
<td>Responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liable</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigorous</td>
<td>Cheerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faithful</td>
<td>Timid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your responses will vary according to how you see yourself and the culture you are from. However, as we have seen, how you see yourself is only one of identity. Now let's look more at the social side of identity, and consider how these different traits might be categorized by society as a whole, so that some are associated with men and others with women.

**Activity 2.2**

Look through the list of character descriptions in Table 2.1 again. For each one, write down whether you think it is thought to be typical of men or women in general, or neither, in your culture today.

**Comment**

Table 2.2 shows a gendered categorization of these traits, based on a small survey which we carried out in the UK. This shows how they can be regarded as culturally typical of women and of men in a particular society. Look again at your answers to Activities 2.1 and 2.2 in the light of this possible classification. There is clearly scope for disagreement here. Look specifically for differences between this classification and your answers, and think about why these differences might exist.
TABLE 2.2  Typically feminine and typically masculine characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine characteristics</th>
<th>Masculine characteristics</th>
<th>Neutral characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anxious</td>
<td>active</td>
<td>acute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>co-operative</td>
<td>arrogant</td>
<td>benevolent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faithful</td>
<td>assertive</td>
<td>calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gentle</td>
<td>athletic</td>
<td>cheerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humane</td>
<td>commanding</td>
<td>conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intuitive</td>
<td>crude</td>
<td>dignified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kind</td>
<td>decisive</td>
<td>flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passive</td>
<td>individualistic</td>
<td>informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptive</td>
<td>irresponsible</td>
<td>jealous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsible</td>
<td>proud</td>
<td>lucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tactful</td>
<td>robust</td>
<td>modest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tender</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>playful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tidy</td>
<td>tall</td>
<td>unfriendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>timid</td>
<td>unemotional</td>
<td>unpretentious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vulnerable</td>
<td>vigorous</td>
<td>weak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Categorizations like these reveal some aspects of how society and culture describe, and prescribe, gender-appropriate behaviours, qualities, and characteristics. These categories are not only the product of everyday exchanges; they can even be used in psychological testing, to classify and to measure the way we see ourselves.

How then can we use categorization to explore our two claims – the multiple sources of gender identity and the role of gender stereotypes?

In this chapter, we begin by looking at one theory of identity formation: self-categorization theory. Then, in Section 3, we will look at the development of gender identity in children, and in Section 4 we will look at the effects of gender identity on school performance.

- Gender is a key dimension of identity.
- Gender identity is influenced by individual and collective and social and biological factors.
- Gender identities are often associated with stereotypically feminine and masculine traits.
2 GENDER IDENTITY AND SELF-CATEGORIZATION

Where does identity, and gender identity in particular, actually come from? We are going to focus on one account of the origins of gender identity by Turner and his colleagues (Turner et al., 1987) called self-categorization theory. This explanation is rather like Althusser's concept of interpellation, described by Woodward in Chapter 1, Section 4.1.

In Althusser's account of identity, people are interpellated, or hailed, when they see a representation of a category and think, 'yes, that's me'. Look at Figure 1.2 in Section 4.1 of Chapter 1. Quite literally, people were encouraged to identify with representations like this. Advertisements do this quite explicitly sometimes, although at other times the process may be more subtle. These representations connect individuals to groups, and by becoming members of groups individuals take on new identities. The word 'identify' is telling: it signifies that the relationship between the individual and the representation has an emotional quality, an 'empathy', as well as a feeling of sameness. This is important to identity; it has a real feeling of personal involvement. Identity matters, at a personal level as well as a social one.

2.1 Explaining identity: self-categorization theory

Turner and his colleagues' theory claims that identity is shaped by self-categorization; by people looking at social categories, and deciding whether or not they are in a category. If they consider themselves a member of a category, that category becomes part of their identity. The explanation given by Turner's self-categorization theory works like this:

1. We see people as members of social categories.
2. We also see ourselves as members of social categories.
3. We take on identities appropriate to the social categories with which we identify.

Identity, then, includes people's notions of who they are, of what kind of people they are, and their relationships with others. It is therefore closely related to the groups – the social categories – that they see themselves as belonging to. So, for example, if Chris has an identity as a woman, this means that (a) she sees people divided into gender categories of women and men, and (b) she sees herself more as a member of the category of women.

Turner and his colleagues claim that similarity and difference influence self-categorization, and therefore identity. In effect, people are more likely to
identify with a category they are similar to, compared with a category that is more different. The more different the person in the image is from you, the less likely you are to identify with it. Women would have been more likely to identify with the image in Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1 than men were.

So far, we have said very little about how gender categories actually work. We know that we refer to them using words like 'women' and 'men'. And to some extent we know what is going on inside them: we know there are traditionally feminine and masculine characteristics associated with each category, although these may vary between times and cultures. But to understand Turner's explanation properly, we need to be clearer about how we decide which gender category someone is in? This is central to steps 1 and 2 of Turner's explanation.

Let's look at an example of this happening in practice. What happens when a child is born? What category, male or female, will be written on their birth certificate? And what factors, biological or social, influence this categorization?

2.2 Gender categories: ‘Is it a boy, or is it a girl?’

**Lord Melchett** The whisper on the underground grapevine, ma'am, is that Lord Blackadder is spending all his time with a young boy in his service.

**Queen Elizabeth I** Oh. Do you think he'd spend more time with me if I was a boy?

**Lord Melchett** Surely not, ma'am.

**Nursie** You almost were a boy, my little cherry pip.

**Queen Elizabeth I** What?

**Nursie** Yeah. Out you popped from your mummy's tumkin and everyone shouted, 'It's a boy! It's a boy!' And then someone said 'But it hasn't got a winkle!' And then I said, 'A boy without a winkle! God be praised — it's a miracle! A boy without a winkle!' And then Sir Thomas More pointed out that a boy without a winkle is a girl, and everyone was really disappointed.

**Lord Melchett** Yes, well, you see he was a very perceptive man, Sir Thomas More.


In the days of Queen Elizabeth I, practically the only significant factor which decided at birth whether the child was a girl or boy was the appearance of their genitalia — in effect, whether or not they had a 'winkle'. In this respect little has changed since then. Children are put into one of two categories according to their genitalia.

But is this really the case? For Freud, in Section 3.3, it was the child's psychosexual development identifying with the opposite sex. According to this, Freud's explanation is that the child's self-categorization is significantly focused on the sex of the parent that is not the gender; this is a way of thinking, to reinforce a gender identity.

There is another line of evidence to demonstrate that social factors are far more influential than biological ones. For the most part, biological sex is a matter of social convention; we may have some factors which determine sex — like biological sex — but the major influence comes from the culture in which we live. In this respect, the concept of gender is more reliable than the concept of sex. We use instead, terms from the social sciences to refer to the categories into which people are placed.

A second perspective is the idea that the sex chromosome (XX or XY) is not enough to define a person's gender. This time, it is not genetic differences that show the presence of sex chromosomes. The sex of females usually results from a mixture of genetic factors, rather than from identifiable patterns of genes.
According to these physical characteristics at birth. Is this really enough to define someone's gender? For Freud, as discussed in Chapter 1, it was certainly very important. A child's psycho-sexual development depends on identifying with others of the same sex - and in Freud's explanation of gender relates to a child's self-categorization. And Freud, like Sir Charles More, thought that girls' gender was significantly formed by the absence of a penis. This is illustrative of unequal power relations between the genders; the anatomical evidence is being used to reinforce a distinction that matters to society.

There is another problem with using anatomical evidence to define gender. In society, we usually wear clothes that hide a lot of our bodies. While for the most part we do not reveal our genitalia to people we meet casually, we usually have little problem deciding whether they are men or women. Because people usually wear clothes which present gender cues, social evidence is complicated by bodily evidence. Furthermore, because of the clothes, we can't usually see the anatomical evidence to help us tell the difference between women and men. So are there any other, more reliable, sources of evidence that we could use instead, to tell the difference between the gender categories?

A second possible way to tell the difference between men and women is to use genetic evidence. Inside every cell in the human body is a number of long strings of the chemical DNA, called chromosomes. Of these, two, called the X and Y chromosomes, are called sex chromosomes. Generally speaking, humans either have two X chromosomes (and develop physically as women) or one X and one Y chromosome (and develop physically as men). So instead of checking for physical differences, we could use the genetic difference between women and men to define sex.

But there are problems with using genetic evidence to decide who should go into which category, just as there was with the bodily anatomical evidence. This time, it is the occasionally blurred boundary between the categories that shows the problem most clearly. Very rarely, people have more than two sex chromosomes; for example, people may have two Xs and one Y. But because females usually have two Xs, and males an X and a Y, these genetic intermediates could be categorized either way. Physically, too, they may have a mixture of bodily characteristics that makes categorization less certain than usual.
One solution to this problem is to define the categories more precisely. For example, Connell (1987) gives the example of the International Olympic Committee which decided simply to define all people with an intermediate pattern of chromosomes as men, so regardless of physical appearance they would not be allowed to participate in women's events. To categorize people at the Olympic Games, genetic tests are used, rather than physical checks. But this definition was made by a committee to maintain the status of the Games. The decision to use genetic evidence to define the categorization was made by a controlling social group. This has created problems for the individuals concerned, who suddenly find themselves re-categorized. Once again, biology does not give us a complete explanation of gender difference. Neither bodily nor genetic differences work all the time. Is there anywhere else we can look for a more certain account of the gender difference?

Another possibility is to argue that the difference between boys and girls is socially constructed. One hint of this is in the birth certificate itself. After birth, it is the birth certificate itself that defines sex, at least in the UK. Although the sex written on the certificate is based on biological evidence about our bodies at birth, and this evidence is assessed by a (presumably expert) doctor before being written into the formal certificate, the birth certificate then takes on a life of its own. It is this document that counts for getting passport evidence then married, your once single

So wherever you end up being tangled. At the end of the day, it influences all we do. Many factors go into our hair, the women. No single set of women.

Something else is there two categories of diversity of everything. So, in that sense, the difference is not between the similarities. It refers, as in Section 2.2, to the identity being made to reflect an individual's sense of self (those outside the accepted group of individuals are called transsexuels). In other words, identity, with all its gender categories, make 'us and them'.

2.3 Are you a person?

In current UK law for a person's legal gender, one's legal sex is commonly called the birth certificate and it is a legal marriage. Although some people may be able to change sex, it is not a legal change. People are "theirs" and "theirs". Can we make 'us and them'.

There are two ways to do this. According to some, the ability to change gender is the ability to change this kind of...
passports, citizenship, marriage, and so on; the original bodily appearance then becomes more or less irrelevant. To get a passport, or to get married, you do not need to display your genitalia. Wherever we look we find that social and biological influences are intertwined. At the bodily level, and at the genetic level, there are social influences at work, and at the social level there are biological influences at play. Many factors contribute to defining gender: the way we dress and cut our hair, the genetic information inside our cells, and the form of our bodies. A single set of these defines, unambiguously, whether we are men or women.

Something else about the gender categories may have struck you. Why are there two categories? Why are there not many more categories to cover the variety of experience? Why are people not all in one gender category? After all, the differences between men and women are pretty small compared with the similarities between them. This is a tricky issue, which we will come back to in Section 3, but remember what Woodward said in the previous chapter: identity is marked by difference. Categories, such as gender categories, can reflect an unequal relationship of us (those inside the category) and them (those outside, in a different category). The differences between us as individuals are reduced compared with the larger differences between us and them. In other words, without difference, there could not be such a thing as identity; without a them there could never be an us. Categories, such as the gender categories that we have investigated, are organized into systems which make ‘us and them’ possible.

2.3 Are we free to change our gender identity?

In current UK law, even if bodily evidence is changed, there is as yet no way for a person’s legal sex to be changed accordingly. This is because, in the UK, someone’s legal sex is defined by the sex assigned at birth. What is commonly called a ‘sex change’ operation (more correctly known as ‘gender reassignment’) does not affect a person’s legal sex, and they can still only legally marry someone of the opposite sex to that on their birth certificate. Although someone may adopt a new gender by changing their clothes, their behaviour, and even their body, the birth certificate constrains their use of the new gender. The birth certificate takes the uncertainties of gender, and hides them as far as the law is concerned. In the UK, people are not completely free to choose their gender identity.

There are two stories we can tell about what defines gender categories. According to the first story, there is an essence to a category, which things have if they are in the category, and do not have if they are not in the category. Having a penis, or having a Y chromosome, are good examples of this kind of essence to the category ‘male’. This story about categories is
called **essentialist**, because it regards, say, having a Y chromosome, as essential to being male and reduces gender to one factor. All other gender characteristics, such as those categorized as masculine in Table 2.2 above, would simply be consequences of having this essence. However, as we discussed earlier, there do not seem to be any essential characteristics, at either the bodily, genetic, or social level, that unambiguously decide gender category membership.

In the second story, there are no clear criteria as to whether or not something is in the category. Instead, the category is rather fuzzy. Although most of the cases may be really clear, there are a few unclear cases around the edges. This story about categories is non-essentialist, simply because there is no essence to the category; many factors contribute to the gender categories. As we have seen, gender categories seem to be non-essentialist in character.

Essentialist categories claim to be clear and immutable, so they tend to remain fixed. Fuzzy categories, on the other hand, can and do drift a bit, so what it is to be a woman, or man, may vary as times and cultures change.

2.4 Gender stereotypes

Essentialist categories have important consequences. Essences are all or nothing – you are either in the category or outside it, but there is no in-between. With non-essentialist categories, you can be more or less in the category. There is a lot more room for diversity. People can be more or less typical representatives of the gender categories that they belong to. There are many kinds of men and women – typical men and atypical men, and similarly typical women and atypical women – although what counts as typical will vary between cultures. Typical men, for example, might have most of the characteristics that we would expect of 'men in general'. Atypical men have rather fewer of the characteristics we might expect; they might, for example, be bored by sport on television, not have a car to wash on Sunday afternoons, or they might enjoy doing the washing up.

Typicality, as we have cast it, looks a bit like masculinity or femininity. Is this the case? Where do these ‘typical’ features that we associate with gender categories come from? Look back at Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1. This image is interesting because it represents a stereotype of femininity at a particular time.

A **stereotype** is a simplified, and possibly exaggerated, representation of the most common typical characteristics associated with a category. Despite the fact that it may be biased, it often not always, has a grain of truth (look at your responses to Activities 2.1 and 2.2 if you are not convinced). Stereotypes are usually either positively or negatively biased, although different people may hold very differently valued stereotypes. Positive stereotypes, such as the image of the pregnant woman in the workplace in Figure 1.3 in the previous chapter, often encourage identification. Negative stereotypes, on the other hand, are more likely to reflect ‘prejudice’ meant either to be anti-discriminatory or exactly how body language and other cues continue to influence gender roles.

This link with identity is particularly powerful. It has been shown, for example, that if someone (generally linked to a specific role) and negatively regards a gender group (the one they belong to), they may feel as though they do not fit in, and tend to reflect, act out, and hide them.

2.5 Masculinity and femininity

Stereotypes do not just shape the way we think about ourselves and the construction of gender (see Chapter 1), they also shape the way others think of us. People often adopt stereotypical gender identities that others encourage them to adopt, or something similar.

Looking back at Table 2.1, there are categorization rules that are often clear. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate these characteristics together.

We selected the traits of the typical man and woman, together a big group of judges. These judges were asked to rate how strongly linked it was. We then ranked these traits simply as a way of identifying how closely they were linked. Other cultures have come up with some significantly different categories of traits in Table 2.2, and the same, or similar, culture. Sandra Bem, Her findings support the idea that gender characteristics are not fixed, and can vary with time. There has been a degree of change in what is acceptable for typically masculine or feminine behavior, and this has changed.

Something else is that we often expect Tables 2.1 and 2.2 to look like this, although the c...
STEREOTYPES, on the other hand, are associated with prejudice. The word "prejudice" means judging people before you have met them, and this is exactly how both positive and negative stereotypes work, although they may continue to influence our perceptions afterwards for good and for ill.

This link with identification is important, as it suggests that stereotypes—particularly positive stereotypes—are linked with identity. In fact, Turner and his colleagues' explanation makes a clear claim: that positive stereotypes are generally linked to, and defined by, the in-group (the one you are a member of) and negative stereotypes tend to be linked to, and defined by, the out-group (the one which is different, which you are not a member of). Because of this difference between the groups, the positive and negative stereotypes tend to reflect, and even reinforce, Woodward's unequal relationship of us and them.

2.5 Masculinities and femininities

Stereotypes do not just shape the way we perceive other people, they also shape the way we behave. People are active players in the development and construction of their own identities. People can, within limits, change themselves to fit their understanding and views of gender. As part of this, people often adopt gender-typical behaviour to form and fit with the identities that they construct. Identity is not just something we achieve, nor something that is just thrust upon us; it has elements of both.

Looking back at Activities 2.1 and 2.2, you should now find that categorization makes more sense of stereotypes. The characteristics in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 are illustrative of the gender stereotypes. But where did these characteristics come from?

We selected these characteristics by running a small experiment. We put together a big pool of possible traits, and presented it to a panel of judges. These judges were asked to rate each characteristic by how strongly gender-linked it was. We treated the judges not as giving a correct categorization, but simply as a window on to one particular culture—in this case, the UK in 1999. Other cultures are rather different, and times change, so there may be some significant differences between different cultures' interpretations of the traits in Table 2.1, and about what is considered gender-appropriate in a culture. Sandra Bem conducted a study in the USA in the 1970s (Bem, 1974). Her findings suggested that there were distinct and recognizable characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity in the USA at the time. There have been some shifts. Today, in the UK, it may be more acceptable for men to exhibit feminine traits, but in other ways not so much has changed.

Something else might have struck you about the character descriptions in Tables 2.1 and 2.2; the descriptions are not equally valued within a culture, although the characteristics that are most valued will vary between cultures.
For example, men are described as individualistic, assertive, and athletic, women as intuitive, perceptive, and tactful. Bem recognized this issue: in her study she interpreted femininity and masculinity, not as opposites, but as different dimensions, as shown in Figure 2.2. Bem considered it possible to be both masculine and feminine at the same time (she called this type of person 'androgynous'), or to be neither masculine nor feminine (she called this 'undifferentiated'). She wanted to abandon the common-sense opposition of feminine and masculine, and offer freedom for a greater diversity of masculinities and femininities, allowing both women and men to be free agents, able to take on the valued characteristics.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{Masculine} & \text{Androgynous} & \text{Feminine} \\
\hline
\text{Undifferentiated} & & \\
\end{array}
\]

**FIGURE 2.2** Dimensions of femininity and masculinity in Bem’s Sex Role Inventory

Source: Turner, 1995, Figure 6, p.17

- Turner and his colleagues use *self-categorization theory* as an account of identity, an account that links with Althusser’s notion of interpellation.
- Self-categorization theory suggests that identity is shaped by the categories with which we label ourselves and identify.
- Gender categories show biological, social, and possibly even genetic, factors at work, but no clear single influence dominates.
- Gender categories are also associated with stereotypes, which may be either positive or negative, and which can reinforce the relationship of ‘us and them’.

So far, we have looked in considerable detail at adults’ gender categories, and at how they might work to shape the construction of our gender identities. In Section 3 we will explore how children construct and take on identities as they develop.