

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER BY JUDITH LORBER

“As a Social institution, gender is a process of creating distinguishable social statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities” (Lorber 2009 114)

Introductory Questions

1. Identify a time during the past week when you were particularly aware of your gender. What part do you think socialization played in contributing to your awareness, either on your part or on the part of others involved?
2. Think back to your earliest memory of gender difference. What was going on in that moment? Who was present? What values were attached to what you learned?

Reading Questions

1. Judith Lorber argues that gender is so ubiquitous that we hardly notice it unless someone does something uncharacteristic of his or her assigned gender. To what extent does this describe or not describe your experience?
2. If there are ways in which you do not conform to gender expectations, name one of them and discuss whether or not your “atypical” gender expression has limited you in any way. Or, imagine doing something uncharacteristic of your gender. How might your friends and family react?
3. Judith Lorber argues that sex is relevant at birth in order to establish a gender category and then doesn’t come into play again until puberty. What does she mean by this? Can you think of a situation in which sex might be relevant for children between birth and puberty?
4. Following Judith Lorber’s suggestion, consider what U.S. society might be like if women were the higher-status gender. What might change? How might your life be different?
5. Imagine waking up tomorrow and finding your sex and gender changed. Imagine going about your day in this new persona. What would be different for you?
6. How do you personally react when you can’t tell what gender someone is?
7. Lorber argues that gender is socially constructed and that societies socialize women differently in order to keep women subordinate. To what extent do you find Judith Lorber’s argument convincing? What else might you want to know before agreeing with her perspective?