

The Social Construction of Sex

The process of constructing reality (the world of meaning) consists of categorizing, naming and typifying.

A social construction of gender approach focuses on typifying—characterizing how men and women are different. It assumes that the categories of “male” and “female” are found in the physical world.

A social construction of sex approach examines the process of categorizing people into the categories of “male” and “female.” Three types of evidence challenge the privileged status of this construction:

1. The existence of intersexuals, people born with ambiguous genitals. This evidence is often erased by surgery.

Martha Coventry, in her account of her clitorrectomy at age 6, argues that surgery on children with atypical genitals is “cosmetic” surgery for “esthetic” reasons.

2. Transsexuals, transgendered people and others who don't fit our privileged categories.

2. The ways people categorize sex—and how they deal with intersexuals—vary by culture.