

Gender Views: Margaret Mead, George Murdock and Global Views

How much of gender-role expectation is biologically based, and how much is based on culture? This lesson asks that overarching question by discussing three different examinations of gender by culture, each of which offers a different perspective on how influential culture is on gender roles.

Culture And Gender

Have you ever thought about how the time and place of your life has influenced the type of person you are? Your culture affects things like the foods you might like, what religion you might be and how much you value political ideas such as capitalism versus communism. Culture also has an effect on your gender roles, meaning how masculine or feminine you are and what kinds of tasks you expect to do as you age. For example, if you get married, will you be in charge of cooking and cleaning? Or will that be something your partner takes care of? Maybe you plan to split those tasks 50/50?

This lesson considers the influence of culture on gender roles. Do you think that your plans for married life would be different if you were raised in a different culture? What about your opinions about things like whether boys or girls are better suited for careers in math and engineering or whether women are better at taking care of children? Our personal opinions often seem like they are the result of individual experiences, such as how our family was structured. But these opinions are probably also deeply affected by the culture in which we were raised.

Let's go over three famous examples of cultures that have been studied because of their interesting gender roles. We'll talk about communities in Israel first, then we'll discuss a famous analysis of many societies that existed before the industrial age and finally, we'll talk about different cultures in New Guinea.

Israeli Kibbutzim



In a kibbutz, men and women share both masculine and feminine roles equally

encouraged to take on traditionally masculine roles, such as farming and serving as guard for the community. Often, people in a kibbutz rotate which jobs they do on a daily or weekly basis so that everyone contributes equally. This equality of roles is admired by many social scientists around the world, and there are still over 200 kibbutz communities throughout Israel today.

In the early 1900s in Israel, Jewish people started to form farming communities based on several idealistic principles. Each community was called a kibbutz, a Hebrew word meaning 'gathering.' Essentially, a kibbutz is a small Jewish community trying to form a utopic society based on principles of equality and hard work.

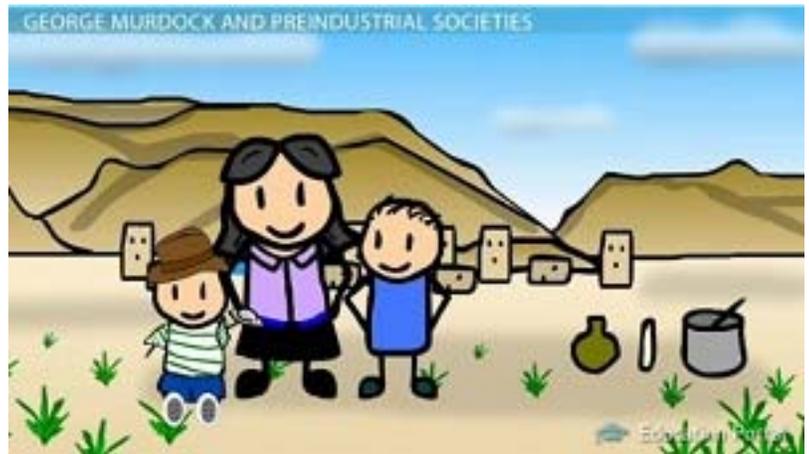
One of the ideal principles in a kibbutz is gender equality. Men are encouraged to take on traditionally feminine roles, such as cooking and caring for children, but women still do these tasks as well. Similarly, both men and women are

George Murdock And Pre-Industrial Societies

A very different picture of culture and gender emerges when we examine our famous second example, which is a study completed by George Murdock in 1937. Murdock was a famous anthropologist who was interested in pre-industrial societies, meaning cultures that existed before the world changed due to factories, cars and other forms of modern technology.

Murdock did a very comprehensive study in which he examined over 200 pre-industrial societies from all over the world. He found that they had many things in common, including typical gender roles for men and women. Murdock saw that even though these societies did have some differences, such as culture or common types of food, general social roles for men and women were similar for almost every society he studied.

Murdock noted that men generally were expected to complete tasks related to hunting and warfare. These tasks required being physically strong and tough and living in rough conditions away from home, sometimes for weeks or months at a time. In contrast, women were generally expected to complete tasks related to cooking and childcare. These tasks were considered better for women because of their nurturing, more delicate nature. Again, the important thing about Murdock's study is that these general expectations were true across hundreds of different studies.



George Murdock found that women in many cultures are given roles related to cooking and childcare

Murdock concluded that the reason for these cultural similarities was men and women's physical natures. Men are generally taller and physically stronger, so it makes sense that many societies would give them tasks related to physical strength. Women are often softer and give birth to children, so again, it makes sense that societies would assign roles to them related to taking care of those children. Note that Murdock did notice some similarities across different cultures where there was more equality between men and women. For example, Murdock said that men and women were almost equally represented as farmers in the communities he studied, and men and women were equally likely to have body art like tattoos.

Now, let's turn to our final analysis of the overlap between culture and gender.

Margaret Mead And New Guinea

The final culture we'll examine today is that of people who live in New Guinea, an island near Australia. Just like the United States has many different tribes of Native Americans, each with their own culture, New Guinea has many different groups of people. Each group is unique, and a social scientist and anthropologist named Margaret Mead became famous for studying the societies of New Guinea in the early 1900s.



Margaret Mead studied the different societies of New Guinea

Relevant to this lesson, she found that there were three different societies on the island that each had a unique setup when it came to gender expectations. The first culture was in a mountainous area on the island, with a tribe called the Arapesh. Just like we saw in a typical Israeli kibbutz, the Arapesh people lived with basic equality between men and women, with both sexes completing stereotypically masculine and feminine tasks.

In the southern part of the island, Mead studied a tribe called the Mundugumor. This tribe was very different. People in this tribe were actually headhunters and cannibals! Perhaps due to the relatively brutal nature of their society, both men and women in this tribe were described by Mead as selfish, aggressive and masculine. So they did have gender equality, with both men and women acting the same, but both genders in this tribe acted more like stereotypical men.

The third and final tribe Mead studied on New Guinea was on the western part of the island. This tribe was called the Tchambuli. Here, Mead did not find the equality she saw in either of the first two tribes; men and women were very different from each other. However, the pattern was still surprising, because it was the reverse of what most societies have for gender stereotypes! In this final tribe, the women were typically dominant, logical and in charge, while the men were emotional, submissive and more likely to nurture the children.

There are two important conclusions we can make when we think about Mead's research. First, many later critics of Mead suggested that she might have interpreted these societies in a biased way, because she was looking for differences among the three cultures. If she expected to find differences, maybe she simply ignored aspects of each society that didn't support her hypothesis.

However, in spite of this criticism, Mead's research has a second conclusion that's hard to ignore. There were three different societies, all on the same island, that differed in terms of gender roles and expectations. Even if Mead exaggerated these differences, changes across culture highlights the overall point of this lecture: that culture does have an influence on how men and women act. Think about your own culture, and how it might have impacted your views, behaviors and expectations for the future, both at work and at home.

Sexism and Patriarchy: Definitions and Forms

This lesson provides a foundation for understanding sexism in various forms. First, patriarchy versus matriarchy is defined. Then, several different forms of sexism are outlined, including old-fashioned, modern, hostile, benevolent and ambivalent.

Patriarchy Vs. Matriarchy

Think about a stereotypical family in a traditional setting, such as a family sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner in the United States. Who can you picture carving the turkey at the head of the table? For many people, this task is given to either the father or the grandfather in a family. Now, assume for a minute that you're heterosexual and plan to get married. Do you plan to change your last name after the wedding? If you have children, will they get the last name of the father or the mother? Most families across the world assume that the wife will take the husband's name and that the children will do the same. Both of these examples - the Thanksgiving turkey and families taking the husband's name - are examples of two concepts: patriarchy and sexism. This lesson will first define patriarchies versus matriarchies, and then we'll discuss five different forms of sexism.

First, what is patriarchy? The word literally translates as 'rule of fathers,' and it means a society in which male members have more social and political power than female members. Most societies all over the world have been set up in a patriarchal system since humans began forming groups. Many religions teach that in a family, the father should be the one who makes important decisions. Most societies expect the father of the household to be the one who provides economic resources, and everyone in the family usually takes on the father's last name. Most countries throughout history have had men ruling their countries or running their governments.



Many religions teach that the father should be the one to make important decisions in a family

more male politicians than female politicians. In fact, social scientists have only identified a few cultures in the entire history of the world that ran with a matriarchal system. One example is the Musuo, a very small community of people in rural China, where women control property, choose their husbands and make most of the decisions in the community.

Defining Sexism

So, why is it the case that 99% of cultures in the history of the planet Earth have run on a patriarchal system instead of either a matriarchal system or a system based on total equality between men and women? Social scientists say that the answer is sexism. Sexism is the general belief that one sex is superior to the other. Most of the time, sexism benefits men, as we've seen within patriarchal cultures. It's true that there are some examples of times when sexism benefits women, such as laws about who gets custody of children after a divorce. However, these examples are not very common.

The contrast to patriarchy would be a society based on the system of matriarchy, which translates as 'rule of mothers.' A matriarchy would be the opposite of a patriarchy; a matriarchy is a society in which female members have more social and political power than male members. Can you think of any modern countries that are examples of matriarchies? Sure, some countries have female leaders, such as the Queen in England. However, even in these countries, the general population is still a patriarchal system; at home, men are still considered to have more power than women, and the government still has

Many social scientists argue that patriarchies are so popular because most cultures throughout history have given men more power than women. This power differential is the essential element of sexism. However, even though you've probably heard of sexism before and know what it basically is, social scientists have studied sexism in depth. If we can understand sexism, it will be easier to see how and why it influences cultures. In fact, scientists have decided that sexism is complicated, and therefore they have identified different forms of sexism and how these forms affect people's thoughts and behaviors. The rest of this lesson will discuss five different forms of sexism that have been identified by social scientists. The five types we'll cover are old-fashioned, modern, hostile, benevolent and ambivalent.

Types Of Sexism

The first type of sexism is called old-fashioned sexism, and this refers to explicit and overt beliefs that men are superior to women in a variety of skills and tasks. Someone who believes in old-fashioned sexism might publicly make statements like, 'Men are just smarter than women,' or 'Women shouldn't be politicians because they can't handle the pressure.'



In old-fashioned sexism, people may make sexist comments in public

It's called old-fashioned sexism because someone from 50 or 100 years ago might have heard these statements all the time in public, but today, people are less likely to say these things out loud. That doesn't necessarily mean that people don't believe them - but many cultures today find it rude or disrespectful to be so explicit with beliefs against people in a certain group. Just like racism or homophobia isn't as socially acceptable today as it was 50 years ago, old-fashioned sexism is considered rude by today's standards.

However, the second type of sexism is called modern sexism, and this form of sexism is fairly common in today's society. Modern sexism refers to three basic beliefs:

- The belief that sexism is no longer a problem in today's world
- That programs designed to help women are not necessary
- That women who complain about sexism are just causing trouble

Essentially, modern sexism tries to make the argument that men and women have equal opportunities in today's world, so people trying to end sexism are actually hurting men. Modern sexism ignores national problems, such as the fact that women are paid less than men for the same job, and instead, it argues that modern policies are unfairly favoring women. Because these beliefs use equality as their surface value, modern sexism is a common argument with today's politicians and policy-makers.

The third type of sexism we'll cover in this lesson is called hostile sexism. Just like the name implies, hostile sexism has components of anger and bitterness in it. Basically, hostile sexism is the belief that women are whiny, sexual teases who enjoy controlling men. People who have high levels of hostile sexism do not like women, and they believe that all women are trying to take all power away from men. Hostile sexists are most likely to publicly disparage feminists, and they prefer women who are submissive to men.



Hostile sexists tend to dislike women and believe that women are trying to take power away from men

women, thinking that they are precious, beautiful and delicate. Do you think benevolent sexism benefits women in general? While benevolent sexism seems like it would help women because it's sort of complimenting women, many social scientists believe that these beliefs really hurt women. Believing that women are delicate princesses is actually condescending in some ways because it creates expectations that women need to be protected and can't accomplish difficult tasks on their own. It implies that women are dependent on men. Finally, it means that women who don't fit into this pretty, delicate expectation are considered less-desirable wives and mothers.

The last type of sexism we'll discuss today is called ambivalent sexism. The word 'ambivalent,' in general, means 'pulled in two directions,' and that's just what ambivalent sexism is. Basically, ambivalent sexism is the belief that some women are good and pure, while other women are bad and deserve bad treatment. When people are high in ambivalent sexism, they sort women they meet into one of these two categories. Some women, such as maybe their own mother and grandmother, are revered and considered worthy of protection and love. However, other women who don't fit traditional expectations are considered to be 'evil feminists' who deserve no respect or love.

Essentially, ambivalent sexism is a combination of believing in both hostile and benevolent sexism, but applying these opposite beliefs simultaneously by simply believing there are only two types of women: good and bad. This set of beliefs harms both women and men by reducing human beings into simple categories, which ignores the complexity of human life and society.

So far, we've covered old-fashioned sexism, modern sexism and hostile sexism. These three forms all have something in common: they view men as better than women. This general view is in contrast to our fourth type of sexism, which is called benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism is the belief that women have qualities of purity and morality that men lack and should be treated like princesses.

So, on the surface, people high in benevolent sexism actually favor

Lesson Summary

This lesson covered several ideas relevant to interactions between men and women. First, we defined a patriarchy, which is a society in which men dominate, and compared that to a matriarchy, which is a society in which women dominate.

Next, the lesson defined sexism in general and covered five specific types of sexism. The types we summarized were old-fashioned, modern, hostile, benevolent and ambivalent.

Have you ever thought about different types of sexism, and how each type has a slightly different impact on society? What do you think will happen with sexism in the next 50 years?

Race and Ethnicity Definitions: Social Minority vs. Social Majority

This lesson introduces concepts important to understanding race and ethnicity. First, a distinction is made between 'race' and 'ethnicity.' Next, the idea of a social minority is defined, along with distinction and subordination. Finally, U.S. trends regarding minority influence are outlined.

Introducing Race And Diversity

If I asked you to tell me your race, what would you say? How about if I asked you for your ethnicity? What about your nationality? How are these concepts different from each other? When you think about your answers, are the groups you fit into considered a 'majority' or a 'minority' in your country and culture?



Throughout the history of humanity, people have put value on these categories and made meaning out of them. This lesson is going to cover concepts including race, ethnicity, majority versus minority status, and current trends in the United States regarding racial patterns of change.

Physical traits like skin color or facial features reflect racial diversity

Race Versus Ethnicity

Let's start by making a distinction between the concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity.' Some people get confused about what the difference is, or they may not even be sure if there is a difference between these two ideas.

First, the definition of race is a socially meaningful category of people who share biologically transmitted traits that are obvious and considered important. This definition has several parts to it, so let's break it down. First, we said that race is a 'meaningful category of people.' Different races are groups that are simply made up by people who decided that they are important. Examples include 'Caucasian,' 'African American,' 'Latino,' and 'Asian.'

Another part of the definition was 'who share biologically transmitted traits.' Really, for race, this means skin color. Skin color also usually has other stereotypical traits that go with it, such as hair color, certain facial features (like the size of your nose or the color of your eyes), height, and so on. But for most cultures, skin color seems to be the most important trait when it comes to race.

So what is ethnicity? In contrast to the idea of race, ethnicity simply means a shared cultural heritage. So ethnicity could be 'Egyptian,' 'Swedish,' 'Mexican,' or 'Jewish.' The ethnicity of 'Jewish' is interesting because it refers to a particular group of people from a biological, genetic perspective, but it also refers to a religion and all of the cultural richness that comes from that religious tradition. Many other ethnicities share both genetic traits and, often, religious or cultural holidays or traditions that tie the group together.

While sometimes the categories of 'race' and 'ethnicity' can be confusing, keep in mind that the basic distinction between race and ethnicity is that race is biologically determined, whereas ethnicity is culturally determined.



The term Jewish has both biological and religious or cultural meanings

Social Minorities

Another way that these concepts can be complicated is by trying to divide people up into the categories of 'majority' versus 'minority' status. Let's try to define these two concepts.

When we're talking about race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other socially meaningful group of people, the majority refers to the social group considered to have the most power in a particular place (and sometimes the most members). In the United States, white or Caucasian people are considered to be the racial majority group. White people have historically been the most powerful race in terms of representation in the media, business positions (like owning companies), or representation in politics.

Majority groups are often statistical majorities, meaning the group with the most people, but this is not always true. For example, when it comes to gender, men are considered to be the majority group in the United States because they have more social power than women. However, from a pure numbers perspective, there are a slightly higher number of women than men. So even though there are technically more women in the United States, women are still considered a minority group because they are a group with less social resources and power. Okay - if that's true, maybe the next step is that we should define what exactly we mean when we talk about a social 'minority.'

The definition of a social minority is any category of people distinguished by either a physical or cultural difference that a society has subordinated. Let's break that definition down into two pieces because there are two basic criteria or rules that a group needs to meet in order to be considered a minority.

The first criterion, or rule, is that a minority group has to have a distinctive identity. This means that people need to be able to spot them or categorize them easily. Minorities could be based on skin color, like race, or by biological sex, like men versus women. Minorities can also be based on religion, which is often distinguished by the way someone dresses or from accessories they wear, such as a Star of David necklace, indicating Judaism. Or a minority could be based on choices, such as vegetarians who don't believe in eating meat and who take an active role in demonstrations and other activities to promote the wrongs of eating meat to others.



Women are social minorities because they have less social power than men

The second criterion, or rule, to make a group fit into the 'minority' category is that the group has to experience social subordination. Social subordination is the idea that, in general, members of this group have fewer resources or less power than the majority group. Minority groups usually have lower incomes, jobs with less prestige, less representation in government, limited schooling, and so on. While some members of the group might be wealthy or powerful, most members are not.

Lesson Summary

In summary, this lesson first defined the difference between race and ethnicity. Race is a socially meaningful category of people who share biologically transmitted traits that are obvious and considered important. In contrast, ethnicity means a shared cultural heritage. In short, race is based on biology, while ethnicity is based on culture.

Next, we made a distinction between social majorities versus minorities. The majority is the social group considered to have the most power in a particular place (and sometimes the most members).

On the other hand, a minority is any category of people distinguished by either physical or cultural difference that a society has subordinated. The two criteria required to make a group considered a social minority is (1) a distinctive identity and (2) subordination.

Finally, we talked a bit about current trends in the United States and that in the next thirty years or so, there will be more racial minorities living in the U.S. than white people. The next two generations of Americans will certainly be living in interesting times!

Challenges of Aging: Retirement, Ageism & Social Isolation

There are many challenges that we face as we age. In this lesson, we discuss three of the larger challenges that have been identified by sociologists: retirement, ageism, and social isolation.

Challenges Of Aging

For many of us, it can be unpleasant to grow older. Our society and culture value youth, and being old is sometimes treated like a disease that has no cure. Of course, it's a reality that all of us have to face at some point, so aging is a huge topic of study for sociologists. Among other things, they observe patterns of social activity and identify the challenges we all face as we age. Three of the larger challenges that have been identified are retirement, ageism and social isolation.

Retirement

Retirement may seem like something to strive for - a goal - not a challenge to face. It's nice to imagine not having to go to work every day, traveling and living a life of leisure. However, retirement like this doesn't happen too often anymore. In our current economy, more and more individuals have no choice but to work well past the age of 65. The harsh reality is that most of those who cannot work - and even some of those who can - live in or close to poverty.

Money aside, another part of the challenge of retirement is adjusting to retired life. Work provides us not only with income but also with social interaction and a sense of purpose. So, our job is often an important part of our identity. When it ends, it's common to struggle with the loss of that identity.

Ageism

Another challenge of aging that may seem more obvious than retirement is ageism. Although it can target any age group, ageism generally refers to prejudice and/or discrimination against older people. Ageism can be blatant or subtle. For example, it involves anything from refusing to hire an elderly worker to assuming an older woman needs help crossing the road.

The elderly are often given a negative stereotype: slow, confused, helpless, resistant to change and/or generally unhappy. Like racism and sexism, discrimination can happen when unfair generalizations like this are made. Although the stereotype is not true of every older individual, age-related bias unfortunately exists in practically every setting.

Social Isolation

The final challenge of aging we'll discuss in this lesson is that of social isolation. Being alone can be extremely unpleasant at any age. It's something that many people fear about growing old because, unfortunately, social isolation is common amongst the elderly.

The two challenges we've already discussed can actually have a big impact on this third challenge. Retirement closes off a major source of socialization, and ageism may result in younger individuals not wanting to socialize with older people. But the greatest cause of social isolation of elderly people is the death of a significant other. Heterosexual women, in particular, tend to experience this loss more often because they typically outlive their husbands.

Related to the challenge of social isolation is the existence of elder abuse, which is the neglect or abuse of dependent elderly persons. Physical and/or psychological abuse, financial exploitation, medical abuse and neglect are all forms that elder abuse can take. So, knowingly leaving an elderly person in isolation when that person is unable to fully care for himself or herself is one form of elder abuse. Although it certainly doesn't happen in every household, the rates of elder abuse are disturbingly high.

Lesson Summary

In summary, three of the larger challenges of aging that sociologists have identified are retirement, ageism and social isolation. Retirement as the life of leisure we like to think of it as is not possible for everyone. In reality, it can mean living a life of extremely limited income (even poverty for some) and having to adjust to a loss of social interaction and sense of purpose.

Ageism, which generally refers to prejudice and/or discrimination against older people, can be a blatant or subtle challenge. Like racism and sexism, unfair generalizations made about an entire population can result in discrimination and age-related bias in a variety of settings.

Both retirement and ageism can affect an individual's social interactions, but the greatest cause of social isolation of elderly people is the death of a significant other. Related to the challenge of social isolation is the existence of elder abuse, which is the neglect or abuse of dependent elderly persons. Knowingly leaving an elderly person in isolation when that person is unable to fully care for himself or herself is one form of elder abuse.