Gendering Occupations: An Introductory Exercise for Teaching Reproduction of the Binary Gender System

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Abstract

This paper presents a foundational classroom exercise used to help introduce the systemic and interactional aspects of the binary gender system, using 12 occupations selected from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and personality characteristics from the Bem Sex Role Inventory. This activity was conducted in an introductory Diversity course at a Midwestern community college over 13 semesters (n = 603). Collected results indicate a strong tendency for students to invisibly gender each occupation without any suggestive cues and a willingness in retrospect to examine their role in the implicit process of gendering. As such, this exercise may offer an additional strategy to help students understand that their individual agency can serve both to reproduce and challenge existing power relations.

Keywords

gender, patriarchy, inequalities, classroom exercise, work and occupations

Teaching about gender can be, to say the least, particularly challenging. Gender[1] is complicated and has been variously conceptualized in multiple ways, including: as an achieved property of situational conduct (West and Zimmerman 1987), as structure and as structuring (Risman 2004), as a networked interactional system (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999), as a social institution, and as an organizing principle (Lorber 1994). Thus, gender encompasses an embodiment, an identity, a performance, a process, a stratification system, and a general organizing structure of all society. The construction and reproduction of gender takes place through multiple levels of representation, interaction, and social structure (Nakano Glenn 1999).

All of these approaches to understanding gender ultimately indicate a link between the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis (Chafetz 1999), highlighting the interplay between the agency of what we do and the structure that shapes and constrains us. These are not in opposition but are necessarily interdependent and mutually constituting:

Agency is the mechanism by which structure is created and upheld (Sprague 2016). Thus, if "collective delusions can be undone by introducing fresh perspectives" or an "unspoiled vision" (Millman and Moss Kanter, cited in Hesse-Biber 1979:5), then perhaps one of the potent paths to "undoing" gender is gaining a fresh perspective on examining one's own agency within the structure. Yet helping intro-level students begin engaging sociologically with these different ways of considering gender beyond biology and beyond the binary is a sizable task, particularly when many are starting from a place of "unquestionable truth" about dichotomous sex = gender boxes: male/female, man/woman (Kramer and Martin 1988).

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Extending the understanding of gender to the examination of patriarchal arrangements and how they are reproduced within the agency-structure relationship may present an additional layer of difficulty. Patriarchy is understood as a system that oppresses women and devalues femininity while it privileges men and hegemonic masculinity (Chen 1999; Messner 2000; Schwalbe 2014) but operates to allow for some successes of those individual women—primarily white, Western, middle/upper-class women—who learn to effectively navigate the rungs of its ladder, or to "lean in" as Sheryl Sandberg (2013) might say. Yet at the same time, patriarchy's pervasiveness may prevent broad structural change within the overall hierarchy of power relationships (Naldini 2011; Paltrow and Flavin 2013; Patil 2013), suggesting that the isolated individualized approach of the "new feminism" may delay the larger potential for agentic change if it is not coupled with broader contextual awareness of individual location and standpoint (Hill Collins 1998; hooks 1994).

Particularly in the realm of work, even the very concept of "a job" and the norm of the ideal worker as "abstract, bodiless" is pervasively but often invisibly gendered in consequential patriarchal ways (Acker 1990:149; Williams 2001). For instance, despite the general public's frequently stated belief in gender equality, data continue to show that a majority of Americans think men automatically make better supervisors (Riffkin 2014), students evaluate male professors as more intelligent and credible than female professors even when the content and delivery is the same (Dukes and Victoria 1989; MacNell, Driscoll, and Hunt 2015; Tieman and Rankin-Ullock 1985), and it is not uncommon among tech professionals to believe men and women may be "naturally" suited by virtue of differentiated biology to different types of jobs (Molteni and Rogers 2017).

My students often had little trouble recognizing these effects of patriarchy and the existence of other inequalities in outcomes such as the gender wage gap, yet they simultaneously expressed resistance to the idea that the effects are systemic and reproduced interactionally among people of all genders, *including themselves*. It was sometimes difficult for them to separate the impact of gender from other factors like individual preferences, managerial or teaching style, unique personality traits, and so on. In addition, I suspected my own gender sometimes influenced their reception of the material. Some students may be more likely to dismiss or diminish consideration of gender reproduction patterns presented by a female professor, presumed as being a woman who is "personally invested" with a stake in the game versus having credible objective authority on any matter of gender discrimination or lack thereof.

Decades of explicit social and cultural messages about women's and girls' empowerment have superficially communicated that gendered occupations and occupational attainment are fast becoming a thing of the past—the "old guards" of gender stereotypes, and the broader patterns they sustain, will disappear because only individual merit and strategies matter now. Many of my students seemed to have internalized this, rendering it quite challenging to get them to connect existing structural inequality with daily interaction. Addressing this hurdle served as the impetus for creating a classroom activity focused on making this process and their participation salient.

To this end, active or experiential learning is a useful way to help students meet the crucial sociological goal of "making the familiar strange" and developing the sociological imagination (Mills 1959). Teaching strategies that attempt to create personal relevance while demonstrating an everyday process may yield better retention and understanding of material (Greenblat 1973; Murphy and Ribarsky 2013; Sobal et al. 1981). Along with methods such as assigned reading and traditional lecture, students who are prompted to explore or reflect on how they *personally* may engage in a particular pattern or process or experience—as opposed to being presented solely with external data they may easily ideologically dismiss as being a reflection of things that *other* people do—are more likely to engage in deeper thought and critical discussion that helps connect concepts. Rather than focusing on a passive "banking system" that compels students to memorize and recall bits of information on demand (Freire 2000; hooks 1994), active learning exercises may be particularly fruitful in the teaching of theory and stratification patterns associated with gender as well as other related variables such as class or race (Bohmer and Briggs 1991; Curry and Clarke 1983; Hartung 1991; Kleinman, Copp, and Sandstrom 2006; McCabe 2013). These activities may encourage further examination of the meaning of "the subtle processes of marginalization and exclusion while also thinking about how to overcome gender biases" (Giuffre, Anderson, and Bird 2008:76).

THE ACTIVITY

This exercise on gendering of occupations makes use of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (or BSRI; Bem

1974) in a novel way as a springboard to discussion of binary gender, reproduction of inequalities, and patriarchy as a system. The BSRI is a self-assessment tool originally intended to serve as measure of psychological personality identification, encompassing gender expression and gender roles in terms of masculinity and femininity. The inventory includes 60 positively valued personality traits or characteristics that are evenly divided into categories of masculine, feminine, or gender-neutral. Respondents rate themselves with respect to each inventory characteristic on a scale from 1 to 7, then the averaged ratings on each respective subset of items yields one of four possible characterizations: masculine (scoring above the median on masculinity), feminine (scoring above the median on femininity), androgynous (scoring above the median on both masculinity and femininity), or undifferentiated (scoring below the median on both masculinity and femininity).

The masculine and feminine inventory item groups of the BSRI are each considered empirically independent scales and have a high degree of internal consistency (Bem 1974; Guastella and Guastella 2013; Hoffman and Borders 2001), which offers an opportunity to incorporate the inventory in modified applications to explore different aspects of the binary gender system. In addition to its intended use as a self-assessment, the BSRI has frequently been incorporated as a teaching tool across social science classrooms in numerous inventive ways ranging from exploration of gender stereotypes and reflecting on ascribed gender roles, to considering childhood socialization processes and approaches, to examining construct validity and reliability of scales in research methods (Bandy 2007; Ludlow 2008; Monto 1993). The BSRI is undoubtedly not without its methodological critics, yet further examination of those issues lies outside the scope of this paper (for a discussion, see Gómez-Gil et al. 2012; Guastella and Guastella 2013; Hoffman and Borders 2001). For the purposes of this activity, the inventory list of masculine/feminine characteristics is incorporated not as an individual or group personality classification or a psychological test but as an example of the traits socially and culturally associated with binary gender roles and how they may result in differential perceptions and the implicit unintended gendering of occupations.

The first two parts of this activity can be done entirely in class or online in survey form prior to the day of presenting and discussing aggregate results. In my experience, having students complete an online survey first is more efficient, especially for larger classes, and allows for extended time in the class period for any lecture and discussion. For completing in the classroom, an Excel template or similar can be used to quickly enter and tally their individually selected characteristics, or it is possible to instead have students work in groups and write the selected characteristics for each occupation directly on the board.

I plan this activity for the class period at the start of covering the specific topics of sex and gender. The associated textbook chapter reading has been assigned, but there has been no specific in-class lecture or examination of the topic yet. Without mentioning anything about gender, gender roles, or stereotypes, I first provide students with a list of 12 occupations drawn from population survey data on traditional and nontraditional occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013): doctor, engineer, firefighter, K–12 teacher, lawyer, librarian, nurse, pilot, police officer, President of the United States (POTUS), professor, scientist.

Then, without identifying the BSRI or explaining its incorporated masculinity and femininity scales, I provide a basic unmarked list of the 60 characteristics from the original BSRI (Bem 1974), with a minor adaptation. To avoid giving explicit gender cues too early and potentially hindering the purpose of the exercise, the original inventory terms *masculine* and *feminine* are swapped for *tough* and *expressive*, respectively. These alternatives were drawn from Bem's (1974) initial group of 400 adjectives considered for inclusion in the final BSRI. Otherwise, the list of characteristics presented to students is unchanged.

Part I: Select BSRI Characteristics

Instructions given to students

> For the occupations provided, select the top 10 characteristics or personality traits you think are most important for someone in that job. You must select 10 and only 10 characteristics for each job, but you do not have to rank the individual characteristics themselves—simply indicate the 10 most important. You may select the same characteristic for more than one occupation if desired.

Part II: Follow-up Question

After the characteristics for all jobs have been selected/listed (on the online version, respondents are

unable to go back to change their selections), I then ask for their individual written response to the intentionally broad question, "What do you think this exercise has to do with gender? Be sure to explain and support your response." Students are given 5 to 10 minutes to complete their written responses.

Part III: Examine Results

After I have tallied their characteristics selections for each occupation and collected their final individual responses, I briefly explain the original purpose and use of the BSRI while presenting the list of characteristics again, this time drawing on familiar gender color-coding using the traditional stereotypical scheme of pink for feminine, blue for masculine, and white for neutral (Figure 1).

Next, I present the top 10 characteristics collectively chosen by the class for each occupation, also stereotypically color-coded for effect. While results by occupation do vary slightly for each specific class group, not once has any class failed to gender the occupations overall according to the BSRI characteristics, despite no initial prompting to consider the sex/gender of any particular job occupant. The striking color-coded visualization of their data on screen makes a strong point and serves as an excellent reference backdrop for the rest of the class period.

A mini-lecture, debriefing, and class discussion about their results follow. The trajectory of the discussion may vary by class based on their observations and responses as well as time limitations and specific teaching or coverage goals, but there are a few primary questions I find serve as useful prompts to get them thinking and talking and connecting ideas to the course material:

1. Are you surprised by these results? Why or why not? If I had asked in the beginning if certain jobs are or should be limited to a certain gender, would you have agreed?
2. Why were the occupations so clearly gendered in their characteristics when the goal was simply to choose the most important traits for any person in that job—what does this suggest?
3. Imagine a person who possesses all the important characteristics you selected for this job but they are not the gender stereotypical occupant, such as a man who has all the characteristics selected as important for a nurse or a woman who has all the characteristics selected as important for a

police officer—is that person perceived or evaluated differently? Why?
4. What is gender? How do we define it? Is it reflected well in the characteristics and the binary categories you see reflected here? How might it be connected to other aspects of social location such as race or socioeconomic status?

The ensuing discussion after this exercise lends itself well to flexibility and addressing important points or issues as they may arise organically in the students' comments. I tend to pose the broader "What is gender?" and "How is it defined?" question prompts after the bulk of the discussion, near the end of the class period, to provide a basis for the next class where we begin to explore the definitions and effects of gender based on their assigned readings. The activity also makes a useful shared example I can keep referring to as we incorporate additional related concepts like *patriarchy* and *double standard* throughout the following weeks as well as connecting it to race and class dynamics.

AGGREGATE RESULTS

This activity was conducted in each of 24 sections of an introductory-level Diversity course at a Midwestern community college. The time period spans 13 semesters (consecutive spring, summer, and fall terms from fall 2013 through summer 2017), yielding a total of 603 complete student responses. Some course sections completed the exercise entirely in class, and some completed the initial portions via an online survey prior to class time. Incomplete submissions where students omitted answers or provided only partial information for the full activity were removed from the data set, as were submissions where students had indicated they did not wish their follow-up question responses shared anonymously outside the class during which they were produced.

There are some caveats and limitation to these compiled responses. No dedicated comparison group or different activity/exercise was conducted during the same time period to explicitly assess comparative effectiveness or influence. Additionally, some research evidence indicates that factors such as age, gender, race, and academic major may make a difference in how students respond to specific uses of the BSRI and gender study generally (Kane 2000; Monto 1993; Murphy and Ribarsky 2013), so it is reasonable to suggest that such

1. self-reliant
2. yielding
3. helpful
4. defends own beliefs
5. cheerful
6. moody
7. independent
8. shy
9. conscientious
10. athletic
11. affectionate
12. theatrical
13. assertive
14. flatterable
15. happy
16. strong personality
17. loyal
18. unpredictable
19. forceful
20. expressive
21. reliable
22. analytical
23. sympathetic
24. jealous
25. takes charge
26. sensitive to others' needs
27. truthful
28. willing to take risks
29. understanding
30. secretive
31. makes decisions easily
32. compassionate
33. sincere
34. self-sufficient
35. eager to soothe hurt feelings
36. conceited
37. dominant
38. soft-spoken
39. likable
40. tough
41. warm
42. solemn
43. willing to take a stand
44. tender
45. friendly
46. aggressive
47. gullible
48. inefficient
49. acts as a leader
50. childlike
51. adaptable
52. individualistic
53. does not use harsh language
54. unsystematic
55. competitive
56. loves children
57. tactful
58. ambitious
59. gentle
60. conventional

Masculine   Feminine   Neutral

Figure 1. Modified Bem Sex Role Inventory list of characteristics by stereotypical color-coding (color shown only in Part III of the exercise).

College Professor	%
3. helpful	86.6
21. reliable	64.2
49. acts as a leader	57.7
39. likable	57.2
25. takes charge	46.8
29. understanding	43.8
22. analytical	39.3
13. assertive	37.3
16. strong personality	35.8
27. truthful	34.3

Doctor	%
3. helpful	74.6
1. self-reliant	58.7
25. takes charge	57.2
31. makes decisions easily	52.7
45. friendly	38.3
13. assertive	37.3
22. analytical	34.3
32. compassionate	34.3
26. sensitive to others' needs	33.3
23. sympathetic	32.8

Firefighter	%
3. helpful	76.1
10. athletic	71.6
28. willing to take risks	71.1
25. takes charge	65.7
21. reliable	62.7
40. tough	56.2
31. makes decisions easily	50.7
49. acts as a leader	49.8
13. assertive	41.3
17. loyal	31.3

Engineer	%
22. analytical	61.7
58. ambitious	61.2
34. self-sufficient	60.2
7. independent	50.7
1. self-reliant	47.3
51. adaptable	45.8
28. willing to take risks	45.3
52. individualistic	44.8
55. competitive	37.3
21. reliable	35.3

Lawyer	%
13. assertive	63.2
16. strong personality	60.2
21. reliable	48.3
4. defends own beliefs	48.3
7. independent	46.8
19. forceful	45.3
25. takes charge	44.3
37. dominant	42.3
3. helpful	37.8
20. expressive	35.3

Librarian	%
3. helpful	87.1
38. soft-spoken	64.2
45. friendly	60.7
29. understanding	51.7
5. cheerful	46.8
53. does not use harsh language	43.3
56. loves children	42.8
8. shy	37.8
26. sensitive to others' needs	34.8
33. sincere	34.8

Nurse	%
3. helpful	82.1
26. sensitive to others' needs	60.7
41. warm	59.7
32. compassionate	46.3
21. reliable	44.3
29. understanding	39.3
5. cheerful	38.3
11. affectionate	36.3
23. sympathetic	34.3
59. gentle	31.8

Pilot	%
25. takes charge	71.1
31. makes decisions easily	67.2
1. self-reliant	63.2
21. reliable	59.7
49. acts as a leader	58.2
13. assertive	55.2
7. independent	42.8
51. adaptable	39.8
22. analytical	35.8
28. willing to take risks	34.8

Police Officer	%
25. takes charge	73.6
40. tough	65.2
16. strong personality	54.7
10. athletic	51.2
27. truthful	48.8
28. willing to take risks	48.8
19. forceful	46.3
13. assertive	42.8
37. dominant	40.3
21. reliable	36.8

POTUS	%
49. acts as a leader	74.6
43. willing to take a stand	65.7
25. takes charge	56.2
16. strong personality	54.2
4. defends own beliefs	50.7
13. assertive	48.8
27. truthful	48.3
37. dominant	45.8
31. makes decisions easily	44.3
21. reliable	38.3

Scientist	%
28. willing to take risks	67.2
7. independent	65.2
22. analytical	60.2
4. defends own beliefs	50.7
58. ambitious	49.3
1. self-reliant	45.3
34. self-sufficient	41.8
51. adaptable	39.8
55. competitive	35.3
13. assertive	34.8

Teacher K-12	%
3. helpful	83.6
56. loves children	65.7
5. cheerful	61.7
26. sensitive to others' needs	48.3
21. reliable	46.3
29. understanding	41.8
39. likable	41.3
32. compassionate	38.8
59. gentle	34.8
45. friendly	33.3

☐ Masculine ☐ Feminine ☐ Neutral

Figure 2. Aggregate data, top 10 Bem Sex Role Inventory selected characteristics by occupation and stereotypical color-coding (n = 603).

factors may have influenced variation in the pattern of selected characteristics, level of gender awareness, or overall effectiveness of this activity for certain groups of student participants. However, no demographic information for these students was collected or is currently available for further comparison or analysis.

Collected Student Responses for Part I

The most frequently selected BSRI characteristics by occupation, as shown in Figure 2, clearly indicate a strong tendency for students to invisibly gender each occupation without any suggestive cues or express instruction to do so, likely reflecting the presumption of persons who are stereotypically

expected to be in them. This is consistent with research results showing the persistent prevalence of "sex-typing" within occupations and career preferences (Bergner 2014).

Collected Student Responses for Part II

The open-ended follow-up question is meant to prompt reflection and introduce the consideration of gender in a way that purposely had not been explicitly included in the prior parts of the exercise. Thus, I coded the responses to this question using three mutually exclusive categories with regard to a student's indicated level of gender awareness while completing the parts of this activity: (1) no awareness that there was or is any connection between gender and their selected characteristics for each occupation; (2) realized awareness upon reflection, *after* being asked the explicit follow-up question, that there was a demonstrable connection between gender and their selected characteristics for each occupation; (3) initial awareness from the outset of the activity that they were gendering the imagined typical occupants of each job position while selecting characteristics.

More than three-quarters of the student responses indicated some level of awareness that implicit, imagined gendering had influenced their selection of characteristics for each occupation. Most notably, more than half attained realized awareness subsequent to being asked to consider the place of gender in the activity, which suggests that the exercise is broadly effective in its intended goal as an initial foundation to deeper thought and exploratory discussion of the material. In the following is a sample of student responses drawn from the aggregate data, reflecting the range of themes and the emphasis on realized awareness as well as further consideration of what their results indicate in relation to their understanding of gender and their role in its reproduction.

No awareness (21.4 percent of responses)

- "I don't think this exercise has to do with gender at all. I think I based my decisions on these jobs without assuming a man or woman were holding those positions."
- "Personally I think this has nothing to do with gender. I didn't choose girly or manly qualities for certain kinds of jobs. To my knowledge anyone can be a teacher, lawyer, firefighter, etc. I feel as if you want to work in a certain field people already know the basic characteristics you need to have to succeed at that job no matter who you are."
- "In my opinion this exercise has to do very little with gender, because I was matching characteristics to professions, not to gender stereotypes. If I think about professions I think about the specific tasks he or she has to accomplish. Nowadays every job can be done by everyone, regardless of the gender."

Realized awareness (52.3 percent of responses)

- "I didn't think this was about gender but in hindsight I guess it does. When you look at a certain position such as firefighter and police officer you think of a male. So you look at characteristics such as tough, athletic etc. But when looking at a position such as a librarian and teacher you think of a female, choosing characteristics such as soft spoken and compassionate. This survey really makes you see how we as society think of gender."
- "To be honest, I guess I didn't realize that this exercise had anything to do with gender until I got to this question. However, each job that popped up I imagined someone in that position. Example: a firefighter, I imagined as a strong man. A teacher, I pictured a nice lady. The entire point of this assignment was that when we picture people in positions and have certain requirements, it may be unintentional of what kind of gender we prefer to have be in that role. There can always be a woman firefighter or male teacher. We just have it in our minds of certain genders fitting into certain positions."
- "Now that I'm thinking back on my answers, the more masculine occupations like firefighter or scientist seem to have more of an independent and tough personality. Unlike a more feminine occupation like school teacher which has a more compassionate and soft personality. I admit, I put labels on the occupations and male and female and who can be tough and soft. I'm actually bothered that I did this. I am a woman and I believe in gender equality. I guess I still have embedded expectations of not only whether these careers should be for a man or a woman but also what qualities they should have."
- "In hindsight I think that this exercise was meant to see how certain occupations are

associated with more 'feminine' or 'masculine' characteristics. Some adjectives as well as jobs are associated with a particular gender and sometimes we don't even realize that we have assigned them one. I think it was interesting for myself because some of the occupations listed instantly generated a picture of a male or female, whichever matched the role."

Initial awareness (26.3 percent of responses)

- "This whole exercise had to do with gender. When I was reading these job titles I automatically assumed characteristics that a male or female would need for a specific job. When I was asked about doctor, firefighter, and lawyer I automatically assumed it was a male. I know doctors, firefighters, and lawyers can be women or any 'gender' for that matter, but in this society those certain jobs are familiarized as male. Also, the idea of transgender has never been associated with any job in society other than reality shows. Thinking of a transgender nurse seems unthinkable because they do not fit neatly into society's neat gender boxes."
- "There is an implied gender with all professions so when I was given an occupation to assign characteristics for I started with a picture in my mind of whether or not the individual was male or female. You have to do that because that's the way work is. I'm sure that was the point."

DISCUSSION

This activity provides a number of opportunities for introducing and dissecting the binary gender system, discussing the cultural understanding of gender roles, and considering how gendered characteristics are subsequently perceived, particularly in light of the characteristics coded by BSRI as masculine, feminine, or neutral. The exercise as presented was designed to intentionally highlight the inadequacy and constraints of "traditional" binary gender roles, thus it serves also as a springboard to examining how and why those roles tend to reflect the dominant conceptions of white, Western, upper/middle-class, heteronormative masculinity and femininity (Amott and Matthaei 1996; Duffy 2007; Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Wingfield 2009). I use it as a fruitful entryway for

subsequently connecting gender dynamics and reproduction to these intersecting forms of inequality, but the exercise parts could also be directly modified to have students more explicitly reflect on race or ethnicity or any other desired dimension within the follow-up question.

Potential additional uses of the BSRI in this manner might include incorporating occupations in which men and women are near equally represented for comparison with the more traditionally gendered occupations shown here and/or incorporating a range of both professional and vocational occupations as a way to explore the class differences and influences that may exist in occupational gendering (Andes 1992; McGinn and Oh 2017). The exercise could also be easily adapted for use with nonoccupational contexts or scenarios, such as family roles, to connect gender with other course concepts or areas. For instance, I recently experimented in a Society and Technology class with this exercise applied to virtual assistant technologies (e.g., Siri and Alexa) and industrial robots (e.g., Baxter and Sawyer); while that variation will likely need some more adjusting to be as effective as intended, the students commented quite positively on the experience and made excellent suggestions for a specific technology and gender application of BSRI characteristics in the future.

Aside from a gender-specific discussion, the exercise additionally serves as an opportunity to make a generalized point about the importance and utility of empirical data analysis and social science research. If desired or warranted, there is room to ask students to consider if/how the BSRI adequately captures the constructs of masculinity and femininity and include research-related concepts such as reliability and validity. It is possible to adapt the activity as an individual or group assignment for students to conduct as a research or analysis exercise of their own. Lastly, the results produced by this activity could be useful in examining longitudinal changes in broader social patterns of occupational gender stereotyping. For instance, compiling my collected activity results revealed that since the recent 2016 presidential campaign season, the patterns of student responses present within the POTUS job had shifted slightly. For the first time, one of the 10 most common characteristics chosen during those semesters was feminine as classified by BSRI (*expressive*), and there were fewer masculine characteristics chosen in favor of neutral (*sincere, tactful*). It should be stressed that this was only two semesters of students across four course sections and thus not

enough to affect the full aggregate results for that particular occupation. It may, however, be potentially indicative of an underlying shift developing as an implicit reaction to a highly polarized presidential campaign coupled with the subsequent election and presidential administration in which gender and sexism concerns continue to play a central role. I would advise caution in drawing any firm conclusions from these or similar initial observations relating to a delimited range of responses, but it does highlight interesting possibilities for future modified uses of this activity and its data.

The BSRI exercise described aligns well with my teaching goals and has thus far been a successful engaging way to "prime" students for sociological gender discussion that is less defensive, limits dismissiveness, and provides logical entry into the various conceptual understandings of gender without diminishing its complicated, encompassing, and constructed nature. Yet it should be strongly reiterated that this activity represents a potential *starting* point to a larger discussion, not an *ending* point and certainly not a *primary* point. The exercise should be considered an introductory or framing mechanism for incorporating other theoretical ideas or material rather than an encompassing summary or concluding exercise. It would be detrimental to leave students with the impression that gender is or can be reduced to simply a binary set of individual personality traits and dispositions without addressing the complex product of structural arrangements and cultural understandings as well as individual bodies and identities (Monto 1993). Equally detrimental would be an approach that examines gender in isolation and leaves unexplored the connections among other central facets such as social class or race and ethnicity.

Strategies that help develop the sociological imagination (Mills 1959) are crucial in the teaching goal of making course content understandable, motivating, empowering, and enduring. This activity forces students to momentarily step out of their taken-for-granted knowledge and asks them to consider how we *all* may participate, even unwittingly, in creating or upholding gendered arrangements and perceptions. Most importantly, it provides a platform for them to begin examining the process in which "we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category" (West and Zimmerman 1987:146) and consider how individual agency contributes to the process of constructing structural change (Johnson 2005).

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviewers for this manuscript were, in alphabetical order, Shannon Davis, Kathryn Linnenberg, and Ashley Rondini.

NOTE

1. I recognize that sex, gender, and sexuality are all separate (yet related), important, and equally complex constructs in their own right, yet an extended discussion of their theoretical, physiological, biological, or social connections and differences in meaning is well beyond the scope of this paper. For reading clarity and to avoid redundancy I will use *gender* as an umbrella term throughout in reference to the broader concept and system construct of sex/gender/sexuality.

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