

century approaches, how the interaction between feminism and psychoanalysis continues to evolve.

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Gender Blending: Confronting the Limits of Duality.
Holly Devor, *Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989, Pp. 178 paperback.*

Holly Devor has explored the social meaning of gender in an interesting and unusual study. The book explores the experiences of 15 gender-blending women. All 15 women have had frequent experiences of being mistaken for men for at least five and usually 10 or more years. These mistakes usually occur in public places, frequently with clerks in stores, but also, with more serious consequences, with police and others who require proof of identity.

Although the number of women studied is small and gender-blending as defining by Devor is a rare phenomenon for most women, these women's experiences are pivotal for understanding the social construction of gender. As the subtitle of the book implies, it is through the experiences of gender-blending women that we realize the limits of the common assumptions that biological sex is dichotomous and forms the basis for the assignment of social gender in our society. Devor argues that gender cues associated with masculinity and femininity form the basis for inferring biological sex rather than the reverse.

Indeed most of us, including the women Devor interviewed, assume that to be biologically female is sufficient to determine our inclusion in the social category "woman." The experiences of gender-blending women show that biological femaleness is not sufficient for some women who chose to present themselves in traditionally masculine ways. An interesting example of this phenomenon is that three of the women who first experienced being mistaken for boys in childhood and adolescence, and all six whose gender-blending experiences began or escalated in their early twenties, reported that the mistakes began just after they cut their hair short.

Devor does an excellent job of showing us, through the experience of the women in her study, the importance of gender in our social and emotional lives. The women reported both very positive and very negative consequences of gender-blending experiences. On the positive side, these women found that being mistaken for a man in public offered them a physical safety that they did not otherwise feel. Furthermore, several reported increased respect from others and self-confidence when they were mistaken for men. These women's descriptions of how it feels to walk down the street at night when one is thought to be male provide some of the most powerful data I have encountered which illustrates the importance of gender in determining our experience of the world. On the negative side, these women experienced the fear more feminine women have of men in public situations. Often other women would cross the street at night to avoid walking past them. More seriously for the gender-blending women, women's public bathrooms were places where they were often unwanted, feared, removed by force and humiliated. And some of them reported highly degrading and humiliating experiences when they were forced to prove their physical sex to police officers or other authorities. In spite of the negative experiences, all of the women felt the advantages of being mistaken for a man outweighed the disadvantages. As Devor clearly points out, this is not surprising in a patriarchal society.

This book is very readable and, except for the last chapter, free of jargon. The author has included her own excellent photographs of gender-blending women throughout the book. These photographs provide the reader with visual images that not only supplement but also enrich the written text. This book could be used by undergraduate as well as graduate students, and anyone interested in the development and construction of gender in our society would find Devor's book useful.

The book is divided into two parts. The first three chapters explore the biological, psychological and social bases of gender. They provide very good critical reviews of the existing academic literature. The chapter on biological bases is particularly well done and provides the researcher, teacher and student with up-to-date and critical information in this most controversial of areas. These first three chapters could easily be used as a text for an undergraduate course in psychology, sociology, or women's studies on the development of gender. The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters explore the early childhood experiences, sexuality, and everyday adult experiences of gender-blending women. These chapters form the basis of a descriptive study that would make an excellent text for

advanced undergraduate or graduate courses on the social construction of gender.

The last chapter describes Devor's theoretical model of the social creation of gender. I found this chapter weaker than the others because of Devor's increased use of jargon and the presence of confusing diagrams that were not explained in detail in the text. Her argument that the creation of gender is complex, that it depends critically on feedback from the social world, and that it occurs at both the level of individual behaviour (microsocial) and social institutions (macrosocial), is true. What is problematic is that the reader who, until now, has been enlightened about the construction of gender may well become confused. A more detailed explanation of the most complex diagram (The Social Construction of Gender) with specific examples from the gender-blending women would help to make the theory clearer.

Overall, this is a very good book and I would recommend it to a wide range of readers interested in issues of gender and identity. The experiences of the gender-blending women, which Devor elucidates so clearly, bring to the forefront what remains in the background for most women. In the process of making prominent what most of us take for granted, these women have a great deal to teach us. By sensitively and intelligently describing these voices to us, Devor has made an important contribution to the study of gender.

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