

Gender Socialisation

Source: Best, Griffiths and Hope (2000) *Active Sociology*

Gender roles vary considerably in different societies and Anne Oakley in a range of books over many years has demonstrated that gender roles in our society are acquired via the process of socialisation rather than biologically determined. Oakley (1981) argues that gender socialisation had four central elements:

- **Manipulation** - Parents would encourage or discourage ways of behaving in their children on the basis of what they considered to be normal or abnormal behaviour for a male or female child.
- **Canalization** - Parents direct their children's interests towards appropriate games and toys for their gender. Drawing upon his own experience, Stephen Pfohl (1992) talks about how he asked his parents if he could have a baby brother or sister, when they refused he asked if he could have a doll instead. Reluctantly, his parents agreed. Whilst in his bedroom with the window open, Stephen heard his parents discussing the doll and their concerns about it. On hearing this, Stephen went downstairs and asked his parents to take the doll back to the shop and exchange it for a gun. His parents were pleased.
- **Verbal appellations** - this is the use of language to label children in a way that reinforces appropriate gender identification. Think of the pet names applied to children according to gender.
- **Different activities** - Girls are encouraged to participate in indoor activities which are often 'domestic' in nature. Boys are encouraged to participate in more outdoor activities.

In summary, it is through this gendered socialisation process that we develop our personality, our sense of self and our identity as female or male. Diverse cultures have diverse forms of socialising the people that live with those cultures so that gender roles also vary considerably in different societies.

Many of the answers are in the passage. Some are not! If you have difficulties, then make a note that you should return and revise.

1. Name societies with different gender patterns from our own. Summarise these differences.
2. To which perspective does Ann Oakley belong?
3. Describe the sociological methodologies which she and others belonging to her tradition of thought use.
4. Explain each of the terms used by Oakley in your own language and with personal examples.
5. Can you suggest other ways in which gender socialisation can occur beyond those mentioned in the passage?
6. Summarise the nature/nurture debate and suggest reasons why sociologists reject the views of sociobiologists.

Offer an evaluation of the work of Oakley and her contribution to sociology