

Discussion Questions
“True Women and Real Men: Myths of Gender”

“Becoming Members of Society: Learning the Social Meanings of Gender” by Holly Devor

1. What does Devor mean by the term “gender identity”? How does it evolve in very young children? What does Devor mean when she says that five-year-olds understand gender on the basis of role information rather than anatomy? How does this change as they become adults?
2. What does Devor mean when she says that many “language systems . . . conceptualize gender as binary and permanent” (415). What are some alternatives found in other cultures?
3. Devor describes children’s identities as developing an “I” as well as a “me” (416). What does she mean by this?
4. What is meant by a “generalized other” and a “significant other”? How do these two “others” affect the development of gender identity?
5. What do the terms *masculinity* and *femininity* mean? How are they different from the terms male and female? Devor states that “it seems likely that many aspects of masculinity and femininity are the result, rather than the cause, of status inequalities” (418). What does she mean?
6. How are various activities divided into “suitable and unsuitable categories for each gender class” (418)? What are some examples? What is the result of this division, according to Devor?
7. What is meant by the term “patriarchal gender schema” (418)? Explain what Devor means in ¶14 and 15.
8. What defines “feminine” postures and uses of space, speech patterns, and modes of dress?
9. What defines “masculine” postures and uses of space, speech patterns, and modes of dress?
10. What are the “four main attributes of masculinity” expressed in North America? How do these “reflect the patriarchal ideology” (420)?
11. Devor states, “In patriarchally organized societies, masculine values become the ideological structure of the society as a whole. Masculinity thus becomes ‘innately’ valuable and femininity serves a contrapuntal function to delineate and magnify the hierarchical dominance of masculinity” (420). What does she mean by this?
12. At the end of her essay, Devor states, “Biological evidence is equivocal about the source of gender roles; psychological androgyny is a widely accepted concept” (421). What does this mean?

“Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt”: Advertising and Violence by Jean Kilbourne

1. What, according to Kilbourne, are the similarities between advertising and pornography? What does she mean when she says that “Men conquer and women ensnare” (445)? How does this represent a disparity in power between men and women?
2. How does Kilbourne distinguish between pornography that might be “kinky good fun” and that which is dangerous? What are some of the examples she cites to illustrate this difference?
3. In ¶5, Kilbourne states that “popular culture usually trivializes [relational skills] in women” (447). What evidence does she give to support her position?
4. What is the connection between alcohol consumption and rape? How does Kilbourne connect this to advertising? How is the perception of male responsibility and female responsibility in a rape altered by alcohol consumption?
5. Why, according to Kilbourne, are women “especially cruel judges of other women’s sexual behavior” (450)?
6. Kilbourne states, “We believe we are not affected by these images, but most of us experience visceral shock when we pay conscious attention to them. Could they be any less shocking on an unconscious level?” (451). What does she mean by this? What does she see as the significance of this conscious or unconscious “visceral shock”?
7. What, according to Kilbourne, is the connection between advertising and domestic violence?
8. What is Kilbourne’s assessment of the “role-reversal” seen in the Diet Coke ad and others? Why does she believe that it fails to “describe any truth” (454)?
9. Kilbourne says, “In the past twenty years or so, there have been several trends in fashion and advertising that could be seen as cultural reactions to the women’s movement” (456). What does she mean by this? What are some of these trends?
10. Ultimately, for Kilbourne, what is the result of the pervasiveness of sexuality and violence in advertising? How does she see it as connected to sexual harassment and addiction?