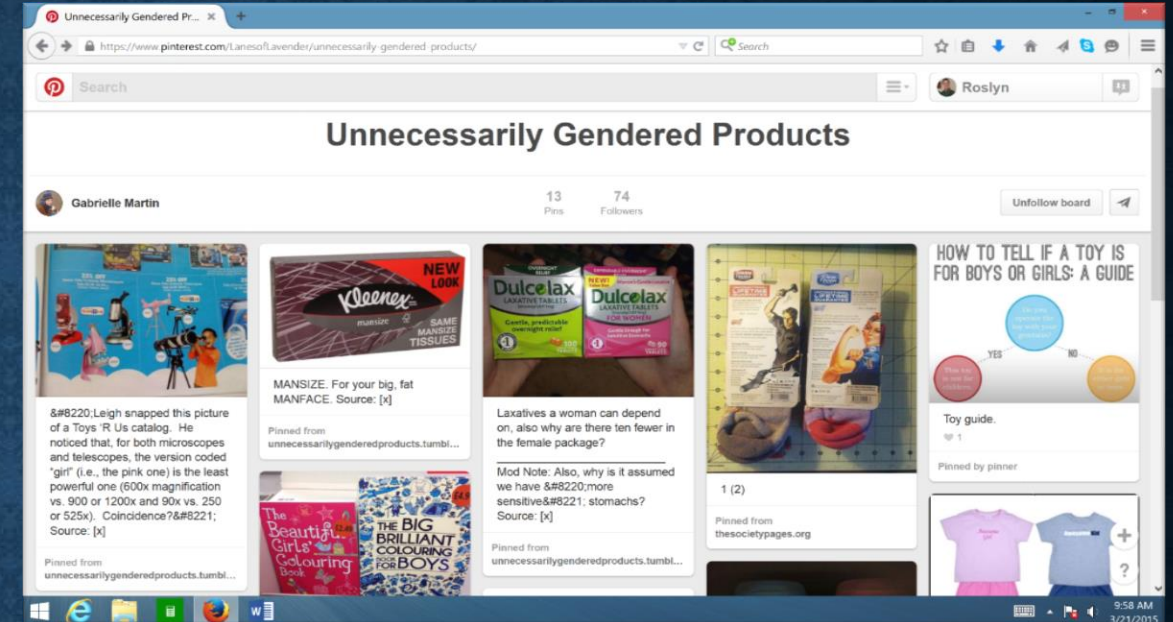


The background of the slide is a photograph of a construction site at dusk or dawn. Silhouetted against a pale, hazy sky are the complex metal frameworks of scaffolding and cranes. A large, dark rectangular object is being hoisted by a crane in the upper right. In the lower right, a small figure of a worker is visible on a platform.

# CONSTRUCTING GENDER AND SEXUALITY

SOCI 4303

Social Inequalities



## WHAT'S GOING ON?

- When products are marketed for women and girls, not only does it perpetuate stereotypes, but we sometimes see something known as “The Pink Tax.”
- **The Pink Tax** is phenomenon where products marketed to women will cost more than the same product marketed to men.
- Legal scholars have written about it here: <https://scholarlycommons.law.cwsl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1652&context=cwlr>



# SOME DEFINITIONS TO CONSIDER

## Gender

- The physical, behavioral, and personality traits that a group considers normal for men and women
- Assigned based on membership in sex category

## Sex

- Membership in one of two distinct categories – male or female
- Based on biological factors like chromosomes but understood through cultural frames.

**REMEMBER:** The definition of sex categories (male vs female) is also a social one!

Our ideas of biology are always filtered through a socio-cultural lens. For example, do breasts always mean female? Do two X chromosomes always mean female? What about three X chromosomes? There is far more biological diversity in sex characteristics than the two categories we typically assign culturally.

# JUDITH LORBER – “THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER”

- “For humans, the social is the natural.” (p.118)
- Gender is a **social institution**.
- “Gender is a *process* of creating distinguishable **social statuses** for the assignment of rights and responsibilities.” (p.114)
  - As a process, gender does the work of defining and redefining the social differences between men and women.
  - “Throughout their lives, individuals learn what is expected, see what is expected, act and react in expected ways, and thus simultaneously construct and maintain the gender order.” (p. 114)
- Gender is embedded in a stratified social system that ranks statuses unequally, making gender a *building block* of our structure of inequality.
  - Gender ranks men above women *of the same race and class*.
  - Rather than different but equal, we construct the feminine as inferior and contaminating.



## **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER: WHEN DOES GENDER BECOME VISIBLE?**

- Today, with technologies that allow us to see “sex” prior to birth, the mapping of gender onto a sex binary is evident before some of us are born.
- Through others’ imagination of you as either a future boy or girl, you were being “gendered” before you were even conceived.

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

- “The paradox of human nature is that it is always a manifestation of cultural meanings, social relationships, and power politics...” (p.117)
- This emerges from many things. Lorber argues that it is mostly for the need for a reliable division of labor. This means labor to do the work of food production and *social reproduction* of new members of society.





# THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

- There is no core or bedrock in human nature below these endlessly looping processes of the social production of sex and gender, self and other, identity and psyche, each of which is a complex cultural construction.
- This is so difficult for us to see because our contemporary cultural frame for constructing gender uses science, biology, and misguided ideas of human history and human evolution.



# HOW DO WE KNOW GENDER IS SOCIAL?

- Question: What strong evidence is there that gender is socially constructed?
- Answer: Two kinds -- Variation across time and variation across cultures
  - If we look at other cultures around the world, do they all perform women and man the exact same way? No!
  - If we look at humans throughout history, have the rules for being a man or woman always been the same? No!
- Gender is reconstructed alongside shifts in other major social institutions.
  - Economy and Work
  - Religion
  - Family
  - Education
  - Media

Photo: King Louis XIV wearing red heels, 1700s

**GENDER IS RELATIONAL.  
AS WE CONSTRUCT  
DIFFERENT GENDER  
CATEGORIES, WE CONSTRUCT  
THEM AS UNEQUAL.**

Inequality *through* difference.

# TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX

- Gender binary – feminine / masculine
- Sex binary – female/male
- **Gender is frequently, but not inherently, related to sex.**
- Gender identity: an internal sense of gender; the sense of being feminine or masculine, trans, or another gender expression.
- Everyone—transgender or not—has a gender identity. Most people never think about what their gender identity is because it matches their sex at birth.
- Gender identity and sexual orientation are two different things.
  - Sexual orientation refers to whom you are attracted to.
  - Like non-trans people, transgender people can be of any sexual orientation.

# TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX

- At birth, individuals are typically assigned a gender category based on the appearance of their external genitalia.
- However...Sometimes the genitalia are ambiguous.
  - Every year, around 2,000 babies are born with sex characteristics that cannot easily be categorized as male or female.
- Sometimes the external genitalia don't match what develops internally.
- Sometimes the external genitalia don't match what happened hormonally during puberty.
- Sometimes the individual's gender identity simply does not match their assigned category.
- There is a lot of room for natural diversity here!

# TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX

- A person who identifies as transgender has a gender identity that does not match the sex (or gender) they were assigned at birth. At some point, they may come to express their gender identity and so they have “transitioned” away from the gender they were assigned at birth.
  - There is not a set amount of time for this to occur, nor is there a standard for when in life this should occur. Some people transition early in life, some people might transition much later in life.
  - No specific set of steps is necessary to “complete” a transition—it’s a matter of what is right for each person.
    - Sometimes, it is a matter of what a person can afford.
- People who are intersex have reproductive anatomy or genes that don’t fit the sex binary. They may be born with hormones, genitalia, or other sex characteristics that do not match typical patterns of biological maleness or femaleness. They exist elsewhere on the continuum.