

## SYNTHESIS QUESTION: GENDER

Suggested reading time: 15 minutes

Suggested writing time: 40 minutes

### INTRODUCTION

To some extent, traditional views of masculinity and femininity have been replaced with more diverse perspectives. Yet the debate continues about whether gender-based roles are socially constructed—the result of social and cultural forces—biologically determined, or a combination of both.

### ASSIGNMENT

Read the following sources and any accompanying information carefully. **Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, discuss how gender influences our identity.**

*Use the sources to support your position; avoid mere paraphrasing or summary. Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument.*

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

You may refer to the sources as Source A, Source B, and so on; or by the descriptions in the parentheses. Authors, titles, and publication data are included for your convenience.

- Source A (“Enrollment”)
- Source B (“Same-Sex Classes”)
- Source C (“Children’s Museum”)
- Source D (Karpf)
- Source E (Gerlach)
- Source F (Boseley)
- Source G (Huffaker)

**SOURCE A**

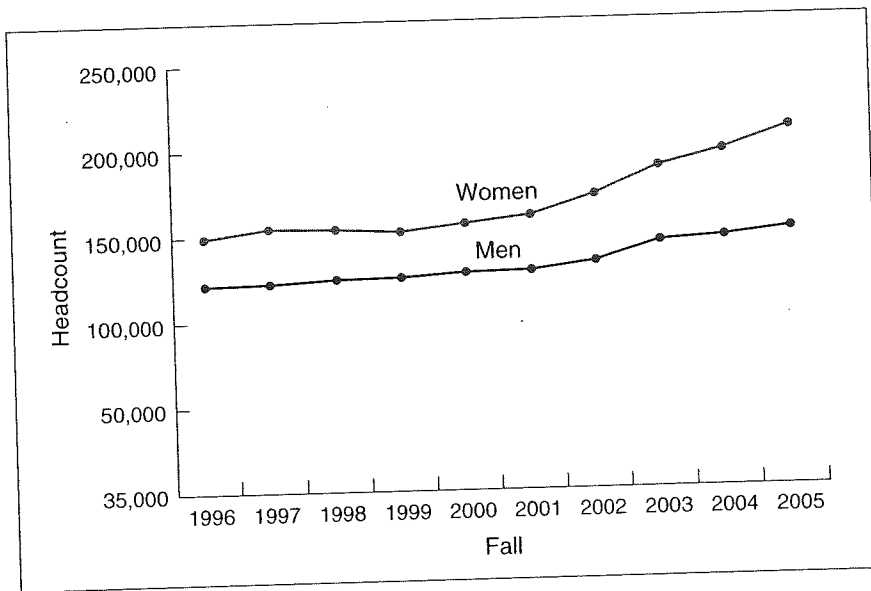
"Enrollment Statistics at a Glance." Table/graph. *Minnesota Office of Higher Education*  
21 Feb. 2007. Web.

The following table and graph are from an online source that details college enrollment statistics.

**Enrollment by Gender, Fall 2005**

	UNDERGRADUATE		GRADUATE		TOTAL	
Women	159,772	57%	49,914	65%	209,686	58%
Men	122,803	43%	27,352	35%	150,155	42%
Total	282,575	100%	77,266	100%	359,841	100%

There were 5,064 students who did not report gender.



Source: Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2007.

**SOURCE B**

“Same-Sex Classes a Growing Trend in Public Schools.” Associated Press, 25 Jan. 2007. Web.

*The following is an excerpt from an Associated Press article about a recent trend in schooling in the United States.*

Milwaukee would join several other large cities where public schools already offer single-sex classes. They include New York City—where there are nine single-sex public schools—as well as Chicago, Dallas, Seattle and Washington, D.C.

Plans to open same-sex schools have been announced in Miami, Atlanta and Cleveland.

Nationwide, at least 253 public schools offer single-sex classes and 51 schools are entirely single sex, according to the National Association for Single Sex Public Education. In 1995, just three public schools offered single-sex classes.

Critics of same-sex classrooms argue that proven methods of improving education should be pursued instead of one that divides boys and girls. Separating boys and girls is tantamount to “separate but equal” segregation-era classrooms, they say.

“Too many schools feel they can carry out a social experiment with students’ education with really the flimsiest of theories,” said Emily Martin, deputy director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Women’s Rights Project.

Single-sex schools are an “illusionary silver bullet,” said Lisa Maatz, director of public policy and government relations for the American Association of University Women. They distract from real problems and do not offer proven solutions such as lower class sizes and sufficient funding, she said.

Many classrooms and schools could make the switch thanks to a change made by the U.S. Department of Education in November.

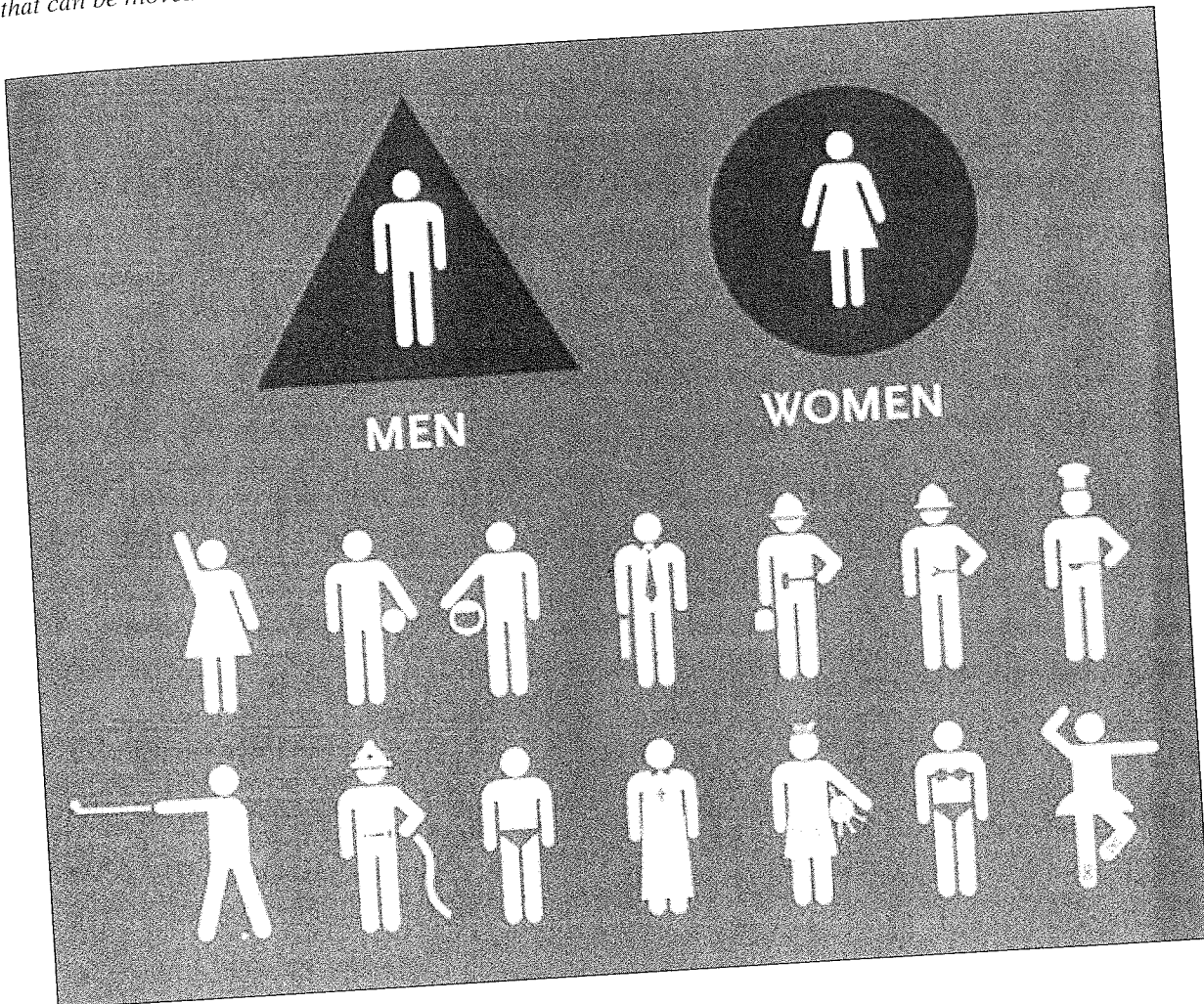
Previously, single-sex classes had been allowed in only limited cases, such as gym classes and sex education classes. But the new rules allow same-sex education any time schools think it will improve achievement, expand the diversity of courses or meet students’ individual needs.

Enrollment must be voluntary and any children excluded from the class must get a “substantially equal” coed class in the same subject, if not a separate single-sex class.

**SOURCE C**

"Children's Museum Gender Game." Whitehouse & Company, 21 Feb. 2007. Web.

The following image is from an art display for a museum in California. The symbols are magnetic cutouts that can be moved to allow young children to explore gender stereotypes in a playful way.



**SOURCE D**

Karpf, Anne. *The Human Voice*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2006. Print.

*The following is excerpted from a book about how people use voice for various purposes.*

Even in Japan. When TV announcer Etsuko Komiya joined a serious news programme from a lighter daytime show, her male co-host urged her to lower her voice, “to speak, not squeak.” And so she did, soon abandoning her natural high-pitched voice. “I feel so embarrassed when I watch my early tapes because I sound as if I was speaking from the top of my head,” she said in a later interview. “When reading hard news, it’s important to sound credible and comprehensible. I trained hard to get a lower voice for that purpose.” Monitoring this descent, a professor in a department of engineering found that her voice had fallen from an average of 223.4 Hz in 1992 to 202.6 Hz in 1995. Komiya’s strategy seems to have been successful: she ended up as the programme’s sole anchor.

**SOURCE E**

Gerlach, Jeanne M., R. Almasy, and R. Daniel. "Revisiting Shakespeare and Gender." *Women in Literature and Life Assembly* 21 Feb. 2007. Print.

The following is excerpted from a scholarly journal article about Shakespeare's relationship to modern gender-classroom studies.

It can be observed that students themselves are concerned about their roles as male or female as they make educational and vocational choices which will affect the rest of their lives. It is important that all students be given a sense of pride in who they are, whether they be a female or a male. Researchers have shown that it is essential that students examine male and female role models to assist them in better understanding themselves and in making unrestricted decisions about their future. Literature which appears to stereotype them sexually and, consequently, to limit their options for further education and career choices can be very detrimental to these students. Females, especially, have been subject to these kinds of limiting roles. Connie Schmitz and Judy Galbraith see this problem in gifted girls: "Gifted girls continue to face special conflicts in resolving society's expectations of them as women and as gifted people. . . . The question is how to be talented and feminine at the same time" (Schmitz 32-33). Emily Hancock refers to the "Renaissance girl," whom she says adult women need to recover and retain within themselves, describing her through the eyes of an eight year old: . . . "I was good at absolutely everything. I was interested in almost everything I knew about" (Hancock 16). This confidence and interest needs to be kept as this child moves toward adulthood, and literature needs to show girls, in particular, how this can be done. Hancock continues: "Much has changed and is changing for the girl of eight or nine. But the most important change is yet to come, the retrieval of such a partnership—without domination—between men and women. . . . Too much cultural change . . . has turned us toward applauding in females the 'masculine' qualities they display" (259). Clearly there is much interest in a dialogue about what the role of females ought to be.

The study of gender roles in Shakespeare's plays provides an excellent vehicle for that discussion. Questions to begin such discussions might include the following: How many males and females are there? Who are the main characters? Are they predominantly male or female? Which characters are stronger, smarter, wiser, more sensitive? What characters did you particularly admire? Who is most like you?

**SOURCE F**

Boseley, Sarah. "Public Outrage Prompts Ban on Baby Sex Selection." *The Guardian* 12 Nov. 2003. Print.

*The following is excerpted from a British newspaper article on sex selection legislation.*

Yesterday the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which regulates fertility treatment, announced that it would recommend a ban on sex selection, except in families where one gender would risk inheriting a serious genetic disorder. Haemophilia and Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, for instance, affect only boys.

"Family balancing" will not be allowed, inevitably leading some parents to head for the United States, where sex selection is practised.

The HFEA's decision surprised some observers, who thought there might be a liberal consensus among experts on the issue of parents who have tried many times to have a son to balance the number of daughters in their family, or vice versa. But the strength of public opinion left the HFEA little choice.

"We have found this a difficult issue and it has taken us a year to reach conclusions," said the HFEA chairwoman, Suzi Leather. "We are mindful of their far-reaching nature. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a substantial public consensus against sex selection for social reasons.

"We are not persuaded that the likely benefits of permitting sex selection for social reasons are strong enough to sustain a policy to which the vast majority are overwhelmingly opposed."

The health secretary, John Reid, immediately backed the popular mood. "I fully support the view that people should not be allowed to select the sex of their children on social grounds. I can confirm that as long as I am secretary of state for health, sex selection will only be permitted on compelling medical grounds.

"We will consider carefully whether the law needs to be changed to ensure this ban can be maintained effectively."

There were more than 600 responses to the consultation, backed by an opinion poll of more than 2,000 people and discussions with focus groups. The comments showed that for most, "the language and values of consumerism, which places such emphasis on choice, are considered inappropriate," Ms. Leather said.

Many said that parental love should be unconditional and that children are a gift, not a choice. They felt that, if parents wanted to choose the sex of their child, they might have strong feelings also about the sort of human being this child should grow up to be.

"Children have a right not to be positively predestined by their parents. . . . If you sign up to that, you think there is something seriously amiss with sex selection," said Tom Baldwin, who chairs the HFEA's law and ethics committee.

In the consultation, 80% of those who wrote or emailed were against sex selection for nonmedical reasons, while 23 people wanted to use sex selection themselves. The Mori poll found 69% against sex selection, with 17% in favour.













**SOURCE G**

Huffaker, David, and Sandra Calvert. "Gender, Identity, and Language Use in Teenage Blogs." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 21 Feb. 2007. Print.

The following is excerpted from a scholarly journal article about gender and its potential relationship to online communication.

Emoticons, also referred to as *smileys*, derive from the hybrid of "emotion" and "icons," and are either composed of punctuation characters or of graphical symbols. Because online interactions lack the facial expressions and body gestures vital to expressing opinions and attitudes, emoticons were introduced to fill a void in online communication (Crystal, 2001).

How do emoticons affect the interpretation of a message? While one study suggests verbal content still outshines emoticons in the interpretation of a message (Walther & D'Addario, 2001), the impact of emoticons and smileys is not relegated to the message itself. They also help form impressions of the author's disposition or attitude. For instance, in a study of chat room moderators, the use of emoticons caused the moderator to be perceived as more "dynamic," "friendlier," "valuable," and "talkative" than moderators who did not use emoticons (Constantin, Kalyanaraman, Stavrositu, & Wagoner, 2002a).

Type of Emoticon	Text-Based	Graphical
Happy	:) or :-)	 or 
Sad	:( or :-(	 or 
Angry	>:( or :O	 or 
Flirty	;) or :P	 or 
Tired	n/a	 or 

Examples of text-based and graphical emoticons

Are there gender variations in the use of emoticons in CMC? In a study of 3,000 online messages, Witmer and Katzman (1997) found that females used more graphical accents, including emoticons, to express emotion in their discourse than males (Witmer & Katzman, 1997), a pattern that is also reflected in adolescent males' tendency to deny their feelings, including sadness (Ruble & Martin, 1998). In an analysis using instant messaging dialogues, males rarely use emoticons in conversations with other males, but do use them with females, while females use an equal amount of emoticons in both male and female conversations (Lee, 2003). Similarly, an examination of online newsgroups finds that women are more apt to express emotions, but males will adapt in mixed-gendered newsgroups and express more (Wolf, 2000).