Role Differentiation by Sex (Gender) and the Primacy of Parenthood

- Role differentiation by sex in American society makes actual or anticipated parenthood a pre-condition for all other aspects of men and women’s roles
- The content of sex roles – men’s and women’s “spheres” – used as a benchmark to differentiate the relation to childbearing and rearing
- The feminine role is normatively maternal and hence, intra-familial, emotionally supportive and expressive
- The masculine role is normatively paternal, and as a result, primarily the complement of the maternal role – extra familial, protective, economically supportive, and instrumental or task oriented
- By according primacy to the kinship statuses of “mother” and “father” these role expectation thus assume that parenthood is implicit in the very definition of femininity and masculinity
- The identification of masculinity and femininity with parenthood means that reproduction is implicitly prescribed for everyone but, as might be expected, it means that alternative role definitions for the sexes are at best tolerated and at works proscribed
- Identification of gender with parenthood
- This linkage of sex roles and parenthood occur in a large number of primitive and technologically backwards and modern societies
- Men and women engage in reproduction in families, this division of labor will be subject to only minor modifications
- Since sex is an aspect of a person’s identity, that begins its influence from birth, we appear to be locking ourselves into reproduction through sex role orientation expectations that ceased to be demographically necessary for our entire population almost before we were born.
- Evidence for the identification of sex roles within traditional parental functions in American society – if the norm is operative, you would expect to see an effort to label the deviation as not merely contra normative but pathological
- Widespread opposition to sex role exists – labor force participation, homosexuality, higher education for women, feminism
- Adjustment to some of this opposition has taken place so effectively as to substantially neutralize these sources of change in sex role expectations

The Working Woman and the Primacy of Parenthood for Both Sexes

- Nothing better illustrates the absence of genuine options to parental roles than the nature of opposition to having women working outside of the home
- During the war – you must now DO BOTH, women as mother expected to do both
- Women do not get equal pay despite progress, reinforces the idea that women are not equal to men in paid employment and are better suited elsewhere (home life)
- Jobs are sex typed, women are protected by legislation and both hiring and firing take advantage of the typical women’s marginal commitment to full time work and long time employment
- Women’s labor in the market has been utilized and tolerated only on the condition that it supported and enhanced the traditional parental role for both sexes
- The difficulties women experienced who wished to challenge the identity of sexual and parental roles have not been simply male dominance or male power but rather the intense social supports for the family role of mother and father