Few studies have considered gender as a central axis on which hybrid representations and identities are constructed and negotiated. Despite the recognition that “racial, gender, class, sexual, and national identities, among others, should be thought through together, as mutually constitutive and defining,” (Kondo 1997:6), analyses of hybridity have tended to remain focused on its racial dimensions and transcultural manifestations. How gender might influence definitions of hybridity at both the local and global levels and determine individuals’ experiences of its construction has, thus, so far been relatively ignored.

This chapter investigates the gendered dimensions of hybridity manifested both locally – through acts of gender-bending and expressions of androgyny, and globally – through transcultural exchange, transnational influence, and globalization. Drawing from feminist theory, it starts with an examination of how gendered identities are constructed in society and culture through processes of socialization. It then explores how gender hybridity might serve to destabilize essentializing categories of “man” and “woman,” and consequently challenge patriarchal
definitions of what these categories mean. The second part of the chapter links these local acts of resistance to the global environment, where gender hybridity must be negotiated in relationship to broader processes of transnational influence, cultural identity formation, and nationalism.

These diverse issues are considered in an effort to address the following questions: How do individuals negotiate gender when defining their hybrid identities? Is hybridity defined differently for men and women? What are the socio-political consequences of hybridity for individuals of different genders? How does gender hybridity intersect with other elements of hybrid identities? What are the implications of hybridity for gender equality in the context of 21st century global capitalism?

**The Personal Is Political: the Socio-cultural Nature of Gendered Identities**

One of the most-often cited statements of feminist theory is Simone De Beauvoir’s assertion that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” ([1949] 1989:267). By this, De Beauvoir means that rather than being biologically based, differences between the sexes are, by and large, culturally and socially constructed. This crucial distinction between sex (the biological differences between men and women) and gender (the socially constructed differences resulting from this biology) remains a central tenet of contemporary feminist thought. As feminist scholar Teresa De Lauretis explains, “[G]ender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which preexists that individual and is predicated on the conceptual and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes” (1987:5).

The fact that notions of masculinity and femininity are, at least to some extent, social constructs predicated on a binary opposition is difficult to deny. One only needs to take a stroll down the baby isle or the toy section of a major department store to get a sense of how this “representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation” happens. The products targeted at children are unequivocally coded (through color, graphics, placement, illustrations) as intended for boys or girls. This gendering of even what might otherwise be considered “(gender) neutral” items, such as bicycles, roller blades, or video games, results in children’s ability to determine at a