

Module 49

Gender Development

Module Learning Objectives

49-1 Discuss gender similarities and differences in psychological traits.

49-2 Discuss the importance of gender roles and gender typing in development.

gender the socially constructed roles and characteristics by which a culture defines *male* and *female*.

FYI

Pink and blue baby outfits offer another example of how cultural norms vary and change. "The generally accepted rule is pink for the boy and blue for the girl," declared the publication *Earnshaw's Infants' Department* in June 1918 (Maglaty, 2011).

"The reason is that pink being a more decided and stronger color is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girls."

AP® Exam Tip

There is a lot of information in this section. One good way to process these differences and similarities between genders is to consider which facts fit prevailing stereotypes and which don't. You may even want to keep a list.

As we saw in Module 34, we humans share an irresistible urge to organize our worlds into simple categories. Among the ways we classify people—as tall or short, fat or slim, smart or dull—one stands out: Before or at your birth, everyone wanted to know, "Boy or girl?" From that time on, your sex (your biological status, defined by your chromosomes and anatomy) helped define your **gender**, the socially constructed roles and characteristics by which your culture defines *male* and *female*. Guided by our culture, our gender influences our social development.

How Are We Alike? How Do We Differ?

49-1 What are some gender similarities and differences in aggression, social power, and social connectedness?

Having faced similar adaptive challenges, we are in most ways alike. Tell me whether you are male or female and you give me virtually no clues to your vocabulary, intelligence, and happiness, or to the mechanisms by which you see, hear, learn, and remember. Your "opposite" sex is, in reality, your very similar sex. At conception, you received 23 chromosomes from your mother and 23 from your father. Of those 46 chromosomes, 45 are unisex—the same for males and females. (In Module 53, we'll return to that forty-sixth chromosome.)

But males and females do differ, and differences command attention—stimulating more than 18,000 studies (Ellis et al., 2008). Some much-talked-about gender differences are actually quite modest, as Janet Shibley Hyde (2005) illustrated by graphically representing male and female self-esteem scores across many studies (**FIGURE 49.1**). Other differences are more striking. Compared with the average man, the average woman enters puberty 2 years sooner, and her life span is 5 years longer. She carries 70 percent more fat, has 40 percent less muscle, and is 5 inches shorter. She expresses emotions more freely, can smell fainter odors, and is offered help more often. She can become sexually re-aroused soon after orgasm. She is also doubly vulnerable to depression and anxiety and her risk of developing an eating disorder is 10 times greater than the average man's. Yet, he is some 4 times more likely to commit suicide or develop alcohol use disorder. He is also more likely to be diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, color blindness, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder as a child, and antisocial personality disorder as an adult. Choose your gender and pick your vulnerability.



Jim West/Alamy

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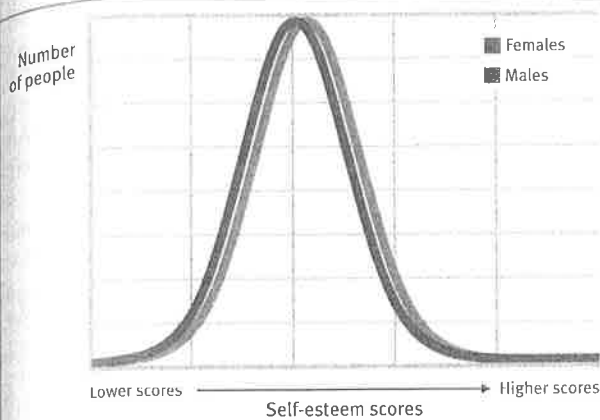


Figure 49.1
Much ado about a small difference in self-esteem These two normal distributions differ by the approximate magnitude of the gender difference in self-esteem, averaged over all available samples (Hyde, 2005). Moreover, such comparisons illustrate differences between the average woman and man. The variation among individual women greatly exceeds this difference, as it also does among individual men.

Gender differences appear throughout this book. For now, let's consider some gender differences in aggression, social power, and social connectedness. (Note that these differences between the *average* woman and man do not necessarily describe any individual woman or man.)

Gender and Aggression

In surveys, men admit to more **aggression** than women do. This aggression gender gap pertains to harmful physical aggression, rather than indirect or verbal relational aggression such as ostracism or spreading rumors. As John Archer (2004, 2006, 2009) has noted, based on statistical digests of dozens of studies, women may be slightly more likely to commit acts of relational aggression, such as passing along malicious gossip. The gap appears in everyday life at various ages and in various cultures, especially cultures with gender inequality (Archer, 2009).

Men's tendency to behave more aggressively can be seen in experiments where they deliver what they believe are more painful electric shocks (Card et al., 2008). Violent crime rates illustrate the gender difference even more strikingly. The male-to-female arrest ratio for murder, for example, is 9 to 1 in the United States and 8 to 1 in Canada (FBI, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2010). ~~Throughout the world,~~ fighting, warring, and hunting are primarily men's activities (Wood & Eagly, 2002, 2007). Men also express more support for war. The Iraq war, for example, was consistently supported more by American men than by American women (Newport et al., 2007).



VLADIMIR FEDORENKO/AP/Gettyimages

Gender difference in aggression Around the world, fighting, violent crime, and blowing things up are mostly men's activities. This is why many were surprised to hear that female suicide bombers were responsible for the 2010 Moscow subway bombing that killed dozens.

Gender and Social Power

Close your eyes and imagine two adults standing side by side. The one on the left is dominant, forceful, and independent. The one on the right is submissive, nurturing, and socially connected.

Did you see the person on the left as a man, and the one on the right as a woman? If so, you are not alone.

Around the world, from Nigeria to New Zealand, people perceive such power differences between men and women (Williams & Best, 1990). Indeed, in most societies men do place more importance on power and achievement and *are* socially dominant (Schwartz &

aggression any physical or verbal behavior intended to hurt or destroy.

FYI

Women's 2011 representation in national parliaments ranged from 11 percent in the Arab States to 42 percent in Scandinavia (IPU, 2011).

FYI

Question: Why does it take 200 million sperm to fertilize one egg?
Answer: Because they won't stop for directions.

Rubel-Lifschitz, 2009). When groups form, whether as juries or companies, leadership tends to go to males (Colarelli et al., 2006). When salaries are paid, those in traditionally male occupations receive more. And when political leaders are elected, they usually are men who held 80 percent of the seats in the world's governing parliaments in 2011 (IPU, 2011). If perceived to be hungry for political power (thus violating gender norms), women more than men suffer voter backlash (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). Men's power hunger is more expected and accepted.

As leaders, men tend to be more *directive*, even autocratic. Women tend to be more *democratic*, more welcoming of subordinates' input in decision making (Eagly & Carli, 2007; van Engen & Willemsen, 2004). When people interact, men are more likely to utter opinions, women to express support (Aries, 1987; Wood, 1987). In everyday behavior, men tend to act as powerful people often do: They are more likely to talk assertively, interrupt, initiate touches, and stare. And they smile and apologize less (Leaper & Ayres, 2007; Major et al., 1990; Schumann & Ross, 2010). Such behaviors help sustain social power inequities.

Gender and Social Connectedness

In the 1980s, many developmental psychologists believed that all children struggle to create a separate, independent identity. Research by Carol Gilligan and her colleagues (1982, 1990), however, suggested that this struggle describes Western individualist males more than relationship-oriented females. Gilligan believed females tend to differ from males both in being less concerned with viewing themselves as separate individuals and in being more concerned with "making connections." Indeed, later research has found that females are more *interdependent* than males, and this difference surfaces early. In children's play, boys typically form large groups. Their games tend to be active and competitive, with little intimate discussion (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). Studies have found that girls usually play in smaller groups, often with one friend. Their play is less competitive and more imitative of social relationships (Maccoby, 1990; Roberts, 1991).

As adults, women take more pleasure in talking face to face, and they more often use conversation to explore relationships. Men enjoy doing activities side by side and tend to use conversation to communicate solutions (Tannen, 1990; Wright, 1989). The communication difference is apparent in student e-mails: In one New Zealand study, people could correctly guess the author's gender two-thirds of the time (Thomson & Murachver, 2001).

Gender differences also appear in phone-based communication. In the United States, the average teen girl sends double the number of text messages of the average teen boy (Lenhart, 2010). In France, women have made 63 percent of phone calls and, when talking to a woman, stayed connected longer (7.2 minutes) than have men when talking to other men (4.6 minutes) (Smoreda & Licope, 2000).



Gallo Images/Getty Images

Every man for himself, or tend and befriend? Gender differences in the way we interact with others begin to appear at a very young age.



Shutterstock.com/Christopher Chappard

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Gender Roles

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Women worldwide have oriented their interests and vocations more to people and less to things (Eagly, 2009; Lippa, 2005, 2006, 2008). One analysis of more than a half-million people's responses to various interest inventories revealed that "men prefer working with things and women prefer working with people" (Su et al., 2009). On entering college, American men are seven times more likely than women to express interest in computer science, and they contribute 87 percent of Wikipedia articles (Cohen, 2011; Pryor et al., 2011). In the workplace, women have been less driven by money and status and more often opted for reduced work hours (Pinker, 2008). In the home, they have been five times more likely than men to claim primary responsibility for taking care of children (Time, 2009).

Women's emphasis on caring helps explain another interesting finding: Although 69 percent of people have said they have a close relationship with their father, 90 percent said they feel close to their mother (Hugick, 1989). When wanting understanding and someone with whom to share worries and hurts, both men and women usually turn to women, and both have reported their friendships with women to be more intimate, enjoyable, and nurturing (Rubin, 1985; Sapadin, 1988). And when coping with their own stress, women more than men turn to others for support—they *tend and befriend* (Tamres et al., 2002; Taylor, 2002).

Gender differences in social connectedness, power, and other traits peak in late adolescence and early adulthood—the very years most commonly studied (also the years of dating and mating). As teenagers, girls become progressively less assertive and more flirtatious; boys become more domineering and unexpressive. Following the birth of a first child, parents (women especially) become more traditional in their gender-related attitudes and behavior (Ferriman et al., 2009; Katz-Wise et al., 2010). But studies have shown that by age 50, parenthood-related gender differences subside. Men become more empathic and less domineering, and women—especially those with paid employment—become more assertive and self-confident (Kasen et al., 2006; Maccoby, 1998).

What explains our diversity? How much does biology bend the genders? To what extent are we shaped by our cultures? A biopsychosocial view suggests both are important, thanks to the interplay among our biological dispositions, our developmental experiences, and our current situations (Eagly, 2009).

The Nurture of Gender: Our Culture

49-2 How do gender roles and gender typing influence gender development?

For most people, their biological sex and their gender are tightly intertwined. What biology initiates (as we will see in Module 53), culture accentuates.

Gender Roles

Culture is everything shared by a group and transmitted across generations. We can see culture's shaping power in **gender roles**—the social expectations that guide men's and women's behavior. (In psychology, as in the theater, a **role** refers to a cluster of prescribed actions, the behaviors we expect of those who occupy a particular social position.)

Gender roles vary over time and place. In North America, men were traditionally expected to initiate dates, drive the car, and pick up the check. Women were expected to decorate the home, buy and care for the children's clothes, and select the wedding gifts. Up through the 1990s, Mom (about 90 percent of the time in two-parent U.S. families) stayed home with a sick child, arranged for the babysitter, and called the doctor (Maccoby, 1995). Even in recent years, compared with employed women, employed men in the United States have daily spent about an hour and a half more on

"In the long years liker must they grow; The man be more of woman, she of man." -ALFRED LORD TENNYSON, *THE PRINCESS*, 1847

gender role a set of expected behaviors for males or for females.

role a set of expectations (norms) about a social position, defining how those in the position ought to behave.



"Sex brought us together, but gender drove us apart."

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The gendered tsunami In Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and India, the gendered division of labor helps explain the excess of female deaths from the 2004 tsunami. In some villages, 80 percent of those killed were women, who were mostly at home while the men were more likely to be at sea fishing or doing out-of-the-home chores (Oxfam, 2005).



©AP/Wide World Photos

the job and about one hour less on household activities and caregiving (Amato et al., 2007; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004; Fisher et al., 2006). Ditto Australia, where, compared with men, women have devoted 54 percent more time to unpaid household work and 71 percent more time to child care (Trewin, 2001).

Other societies have different expectations. In nomadic societies of food-gathering people, there is little division of labor by sex. Boys and girls receive much the same upbringing. In agricultural societies, where women work in the nearby fields and men roam while herding livestock, children have typically been socialized into more distinct gender roles (Segall et al., 1990; Van Leeuwen, 1978).

Among industrialized countries, gender roles and attitudes vary widely. Australia and the Scandinavian countries offer the greatest gender equity, Middle Eastern and North African countries the least (Social Watch, 2006). And consider: Would you agree that “when jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job?” In the United States, Britain, and Spain, about one in eight adults agree. In Nigeria, Pakistan, and India, about four in five do (Pew, 2010). We are one species, but my, how we differ.

To see how gender role attitudes vary over time, consider women’s voting rights. At the opening of the twentieth century, only one country—New Zealand—granted women the right to vote (Briscoe, 1997). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, women had become a force in the voting booth and the workplace in many countries. Nearly 50 percent of employed Americans are now women, as are 54 percent of college graduates, up from 36 percent in just four decades (Fry & Cohn, 2010). In today’s postindustrial economy, the jobs expected to grow the most in the years ahead are the ones women have gravitated toward—those that require not size and strength but social intelligence, open communication, and the ability to sit still and focus (Rosin, 2010). These are big gender changes in but a thin slice of history.

Gender roles can smooth social relations, avoiding irritating discussions about whose job it is to get the car fixed and who should buy the birthday presents. But these quick and easy assumptions come at a cost: If we deviate from conventions, we may feel anxious.

How Do We Learn to Be Male or Female?

Gender identity is a person’s sense of being male or female. **Social learning theory** assumes that children acquire this identity by observing and imitating others’ gender-linked behaviors and by being rewarded or punished for acting in certain ways themselves (“Nicole, you’re such a good mommy to your dolls”; “Big boys don’t cry, Alex.”). Some critics have objected, saying that parental modeling and rewarding of male-female differences aren’t enough to explain **gender typing**, the way some children seem more attuned than others to traditional male or female roles (Lytton & Romney, 1991). In fact, even in families that discourage traditional gender typing, children organize themselves into “boy worlds” and “girl worlds,” each guided by rules for what boys and girls do.

Cognition (thinking) also matters. In your own childhood you formed concepts that helped you make sense of your world. One of these was your *gender schema*, your framework for organizing boy-girl characteristics (Bem, 1987, 1993). This gender schema then became a lens through which you viewed your experiences.

Gender schemas form early in life, and social learning helps form them. Before age 1, you began to discriminate male and female voices and faces (Martin et al., 2002). After age 2, language forced you to begin organizing your world on the basis of gender. English, for example, uses the pronouns *he* and *she*; other languages classify objects as masculine (“le train”) or feminine (“la table”).

FYI

In Module 30, we explored how children can learn—including the aggressive behavior modeled in Albert Bandura’s famous Bobo doll experiment—by observing others.

gender identity our sense of being male or female.

social learning theory the theory that we learn social behavior by observing and imitating and by being rewarded or punished.

gender typing the acquisition of a traditional masculine or feminine role.

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Young children are “gender detectives” (Martin & Ruble, 2004). Once they grasp that two sorts of people exist—and that they are of one sort—they search for clues about gender, and they find them in language, dress, toys, and songs. Girls, they may decide, are the ones with long hair. Having divided the human world in half, 3-year-olds will then like their own kind better and seek them out for play. And having compared themselves with their concept of gender, they will adjust their behavior accordingly. (“I am male—thus, masculine, strong, aggressive,” or “I am female—therefore, feminine, sweet, and helpful.”) These rigid boy-girl stereotypes peak at about age 5 or 6. If the new neighbor is a boy, a 6-year-old girl may assume he just cannot share her interests. For young children, gender looms large.



Courtesy of David Myers

The social learning of gender. Children observe and imitate parental models.

For some people, comparing themselves with their culture’s concepts of gender produces feelings of confusion and discord. **Transgender** people’s *gender identity* (their sense of being male or female) or *gender expression* (their communication of gender identity through behavior or appearance) differs from that typical of their birth sex (APA, 2010). A person may feel like a man in a woman’s body, or a woman in a man’s body. These include *transsexual* people, who live, or wish to live, as members of the gender opposite to their birth sex, often aided by medical treatment that supports gender reassignment. Note that gender identity is distinct from *sexual orientation* (the direction of one’s sexual attraction). Transgender people may be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual.



AP Photo/The Canadian Press, Anton Vincent Ekajait

Transgender contestant In 2012, Jenna Talackova became the first transgender beauty pageant contestant in this Miss Universe Canada contest in Toronto. Talackova was born a male but had sex-reassignment surgery.

“The more I was treated as a woman, the more woman I became.” —WRITER JAN MORRIS, MALE-TO-FEMALE TRANSEXUAL

Some transgender persons express their gender identity by dressing as a person of the other biological sex typically would. Most cross-dressers are biological males, the majority of whom feel an attraction to females (APA, 2010).

Before You Move On

► **ASK YOURSELF**

Do you consider yourself strongly gender typed or not strongly gender typed? What factors do you think have contributed to your feelings of masculinity or femininity?

► **TEST YOURSELF**

What are gender roles, and what do their variations tell us about our human capacity for learning and adaptation?

Answers to the Test Yourself questions can be found in Appendix E at the end of the book.

transgender an umbrella term describing people whose gender identity or expression differs from that associated with their birth sex.

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