CHAPTER 11: MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCES

This chapter begins the section on “applications to individual differences,” which shows how the theory and research of the eight basic perspectives on personality can be applied to fascinating and important issues in science and society. In particular, Chapter 11, which focuses on male-female differences, reveals how characteristics that are obviously heavily influenced by biology cannot be fully understood without also taking into account social, developmental, and cultural influences on personality. Any of the four sections in this chapter may be skipped or taken out of sequence, but students are likely to find them the most appealing and “relevant.” Instructors should be ready for defensiveness on the part of some students, as well as an unwillingness to share specific opinions for fear of being labeled sexist. Encouraging open dialogue and nonjudgmental responses and conversations will help allay these barriers.

Are there gender-based psychological differences? What is the etiology (causal origin) of these differences? How do different personality theories explain how these differences emerge, and how they are maintained? This chapter provides empirical evidence to address these questions and is likely to be fascinating to students, who undoubtedly have their own opinions about gender differences.

Possible Lecture Outline

1. Do males and females differ?
   1. Physical (external) and physiological (internal) differences
   2. Studies have shown that subjects can agree that many personality characteristics are “masculine” or “feminine.”
      1. Studies of validity and effect size show there’s substantial overlap of male and female characteristics.
   3. Reliable gender differences in psychological areas:
      1. Spatial abilities (males favored)
      2. Verbal abilities (females favored)
      3. Nonverbal communication (females favored)
      4. Aggression (males more verbally and physically aggressive)
   4. A brief history of gender differences in personality
      1. 4,000 to 6,000 years ago, females were portrayed as nurturing fertility objects and passive; men as hunters or warring
      2. Women were seen as less worthy, less valuable than men
         1. Plato: women as weak, inferior
         2. Aristotle: women as incomplete and incompetent
         3. Biblically, men were in power and had higher moral authority.
      3. Women were evolutionarily designed to give birth and nurture; therefore, this was seen as their primary role; the “maternal instinct”
      4. Current theories postulate an interaction of biological and environmental factors to produce “masculine” and “feminine” traits.
2. Biological Influences on Gender Differences
   1. Chromosomes: XX vs. XY; genetic sex
      1. Testes develop in XY embryos and produce androgen.
      2. Androgen (or lack thereof) initiates development of male vs. female genitalia.
   2. Androgen exposure may also affect brain development and personality.
      1. Evidence from animal studies
      2. Evidence from studies of humans with prenatal genetic or hormonal anomalies (e.g., XXX, XXY, XYY; Turner’s [XO] syndrome)
      3. Androgenized females: Females who are born with masculine or ambiguous external genitalia as a result of prenatal exposure to excessive androgen levels
3. Later Changes in Hormones and Physical Development
   1. Major differences in proportions of hormones produced by males vs. females starting at puberty
   2. Cyclic vs. non-cyclic nature of hormonal fluctuation
      1. Emotionality and mood swings, etc.
      2. Hysteria and the “wandering womb”
      3. Testosterone levels related to aggression dominance, achievement motivation
      4. Social and political implications
4. Gender Differences in Personality from the Different Perspectives
   1. Psychoanalytic approaches
      1. In the psychoanalytic, differences arise from responses to structural differences (a biologically based explanation).
      2. Freud posited that psychological reactions to genital differences yielded gender differences.
      3. “Anatomy is destiny.”
   2. Neoanalytic approaches
      1. Erikson saw male traits (active, exploring) as tied to outward-extending genitalia; the female’s nurturing and peaceful traits were tied to the internality of her genitalia.
      2. Horney saw penis envy as a minor factor and described men as suffering from feelings of inferiority related to their failed efforts to control and achieve.
         1. Women envied men’s opportunities and roles, not their penises.
      3. Jung believed that maleness and femaleness were both important.
         1. Animus and anima
         2. Incorporate both (androgyny) for healthy personality
      4. Nancy Chodrow brings an object-relations perspective to the question of gender differences and the self.
         1. Individuals are fundamentally influenced by relations with others.
         2. Boys’ and girls’ relationships with their mothers are central to their development of self.
   3. Biological/evolutionary approaches
      1. Successful reproduction requires different sexual behaviors of men and women.
         1. Men: many sexual contacts
         2. Women: few, selective sexual contacts to avoid wasting limited reproductive opportunities
      2. Animal research with the maternal instinct indicates a biological basis.
      3. There are circumstances when it is evolutionarily adaptive for a mother not to nurture her child.
   4. Behaviorist theories: gender differences are learned, reinforced behaviors.
      1. Parents as primary socializers of sex-typed characteristics
      2. Other societal models, including the media, reinforce these lessons.
   5. Cognitive component: gender schema theories
      1. Our culture and gender-role socialization provide us with gender schemas.
      2. Schemas act as cognitive filters and are thus self-perpetuating.
   6. Trait approaches to masculinity and femininity
      1. Are these opposite poles of a single trait? Two independent dimensions?
         1. Bem Sex Role Inventory and androgyny
      2. Male-female differences have been studied in a variety of areas, including:
         1. Aggression and dominance
         2. Emotionality
      3. Achievement motivation
   7. Humanistic approaches: emphasize the good qualities that any self-actualized person would have, including:
      1. Traditionally female: empathy and openness
      2. Traditionally male: creativity and autonomy
   8. Interactionist approaches: social and interpersonal characteristics
      1. Many gender-relevant activities are closely tied to situational demands.
         1. Nurturance/caring
         2. Sociability
         3. Nonverbal behaviors
         4. Influenceability
         5. Instrumentality vs. expressiveness
         6. Eagly’s studies
   9. Cross-cultural studies of gender differences indicate that many gender characteristics are culturally determined.
      1. Mead
      2. Oakley
      3. Whiting and Edwards
5. Love and Sexual Behavior
   1. Stereotypes posit that men want sex, whereas women want love.
   2. Stereotypes of female sexuality throughout history are widely varying.
   3. Culture provides context for learning “appropriate” sexual behaviors.
      1. Double standards for men vs. women regarding infidelity and premarital sex emphasize the ideas that men want sex and women want love.
      2. Study of college students showed men to be more romantic and to have more love; men were also more devastated by the loss of the relationship.
   4. Human sexual behavior relatively uninfluenced by hormone levels

Classroom Activities, Discussion Topics and Projects

1. There are many books on the market that claim to explain the differences between men and women (for example, the hugely popular *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*). How much of male-female differences in such areas as communication can be explained by personality? How much is due to differing socialization of girls and boys, men and women?

2. Have students write down three ways that their parents socialized them to gender-related norms when they were children. How many of these habits still remain? Are they things that the students would like to be rid of? Do the students see that these gender roles serve useful purposes? If they would like to be free of these norms, when did they first realize that this wasn't the way things had to be?

3. Discuss the curiosity, and perhaps discomfort, we feel when we cannot discern whether someone is male or female. Why is this so important to us?

4. Some experts claim parents should raise “gender-neutral” children—that is, the child should have all sorts of toys (trucks and dolls) and should be dressed in an androgynous way. Is it possible to raise a gender-neutral child in today’s society? What are some of the barriers that a parent might encounter?

5. Discuss some of the male-female differences in the ways people act that, although behaviorally different, are functionally equivalent. For example, women have a greater tendency to use prescription drugs to deal with depression (this is less acceptable for men), whereas depressed men are more likely drink alcohol (a more socially acceptable way for them to deal with their problems). The outcomes are quite similar, but the substances used are different and have gender-related norms attached to them. How are people who “cross over” (that is, perform the non-normative behavior) stigmatized? If the outcomes are equivalent, why is this so?

6. Have the men in the class list the things they do not like about women. Have the women in the class list the things they do not like about men. Keep the two lists on the blackboard and compare them. What do these complaints tell us about gender differences? Are the lists similar at all, or are they very different? Why might this be? (Note: this discussion has the potential to get fairly heated, so it is important to remind the class before beginning that they need to be appropriate in the language they use and be respectful of the opposite sex.)

7. Discuss Sandra Bem’s Sex Role Inventory and the idea of androgyny with the class (see Bem, 1974). Why might androgyny be advantageous? Why are masculine traits viewed as more desirable and healthy than feminine traits?

8. Bring in magazine pictures to share with the class of “feminine” females and “masculine” males. What characteristics do these individuals possess? How is the appearance of femininity or masculinity achieved?

9. The “Sharpen Your Thinking” box in this chapter discusses some issues surrounding single-sex public education. Engage the students in debate over whether their views on this issue are the same when the following goals are explicitly behind the arrangement:

1. To improve the performance of females in traditionally masculine fields
2. To improve the behavior of males in the classroom environment
3. To decrease the dropout rates of both males and females
4. To decrease sexual activity among all students
5. To increase the comfort and spontaneity of classroom activity for all students

Recommended Outside Readings

Buss, D. M. (1994). *The evolution of desire: Strategies of human mating*. New York: Basic Books.

Crichton, M. (1994). *Disclosure*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Else-Quest, N. M., Hyde, J. S., Goldsmith, H. H., & Van Hulle, C. A. (2006). Gender differences in temperament: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *132*, 33–72.

Gray, J. (1992). *Men are from Mars, women are from Venus: A practical guide for improving communication and getting what you want in your relationships*. New York: Harper Collins.

Mead, M. (1935). *Sex and temperament in three primitive societie*s. New York: William Morrow.

Shaver, P., & Hendrick, C. (Eds.). (1987). *Sex and gender*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Films / Videos

Dr. Money and the Boy with No Penis (2004). 50 minutes. <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/dr-money-boy-with-no-penis/> or <http://documentarystorm.com/dr-money-and-the-boy-with-no-penis/>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/606616595> . Examines the concept of nature versus nurture in sexual identity through the story of David Reimer, who was raised as a girl after his penis was damaged when he was a newborn. The DVD recounts the medical and psychological ordeals that Reimer underwent before his suicide in 2004.

*Boys Will Be Boys, But What About Girls? Childhood Aggression and Gender* (2008). 50 minutes. Insight Media: 800-233-9910; [www.insight-media.com](http://www.insight-media.com). This program explores relational aggression and questions why this form of bullying is highly prevalent among girls and young women.

*Gender and Communication: Styles and Stereotypes* (2013). 21 minutes. Learning Seed. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/268785967>. Looks at the communication gap between the sexes. Also addresses the ways in which male/female communication differences may have developed.

*Gender and Sexuality*. (2001). 30 minutes. Insight Media: 800-233-9910; [www.insight-media.com](http://www.insight-media.com). Examines concepts of sex and gender, and explores social-learning approaches to gender-role development.

*Man Oh Man: Growing Up Male in America*. (1987). 18 minutes. <https://www.newday.com/film/man-oh-man> . Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/31354173> or <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/22954120>. Looks at the ways in which societal pressures mold men’s lives (includes interview segments). Addresses the issue of being “macho” and the related fears and feelings of vulnerability.

*Men and Women: Talking Together*. (1993). 58 minutes. <http://www.evgonline.com/cart/gender_titles.html>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/29510222>. Communication between the sexes is discussed by Deborah Tannen and Robert Bly, including an address of conversational rituals and the use of comforting as a power tool. The discussants take questions from a live audience.

*Men Are from Mars* CD-ROM. (1996). Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/32749088>. Interactive seminar with author John Gray about communication between the sexes.

*ABC News 20/20: The Difference between Men & Women (2006).* 43 minutes. ABC News Productions: <http://www.amazon.com/ABC-News-Difference-Between-Women/dp/B001JP65MM>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/title/difference-between-men-and-women/oclc/181656022>. This 2006 television production looks at the differences between the sexes and whether they are the result of biology or environment.

*Social Identity, Personality, and Gender*. (2008). 28 minutes. Insight Media: 800-233-9910; [www.insight-media.com](http://www.insight-media.com). Looks at the phenomenon of enculturation, and the ways in which personality is shaped by the social environment.

*Understanding the Differences between Men and Women*. (2005). 30 minutes. Insight Media: 800-233-9910; [www.insight-media.com](http://www.insight-media.com). Looks at both biological and social effects that differ for males and females.

*When Harry Met Sally*. (1989). 96 minutes. CastleRock Entertainment. Story of a man and woman who become friends and eventually grow to love each other. This film nicely illustrates some of the communication problems men and women experience, as well as stereotypical male/female personalities and views on love.