

GENDER DEVELOPMENT



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Gender development

Gender Development is the first book to examine gender from a truly developmental perspective, filling a need for a textbook and source-book for college and graduate students, parents, teachers, researchers, and counselors. It examines the processes involved in the development of gender, addressing such sensitive and complex questions as what causes males and females to be different and why they behave in different ways.

The authors provide an up-to-date, integrative review of theory and research, tracing gender development from the moment of conception through adulthood and emphasizing the complex interaction of biology, socialization, and cognition. The topics covered include hormonal influences, moral development, play and friendships, experiences at school and work, and psychopathology.

To John, John, and Jamie

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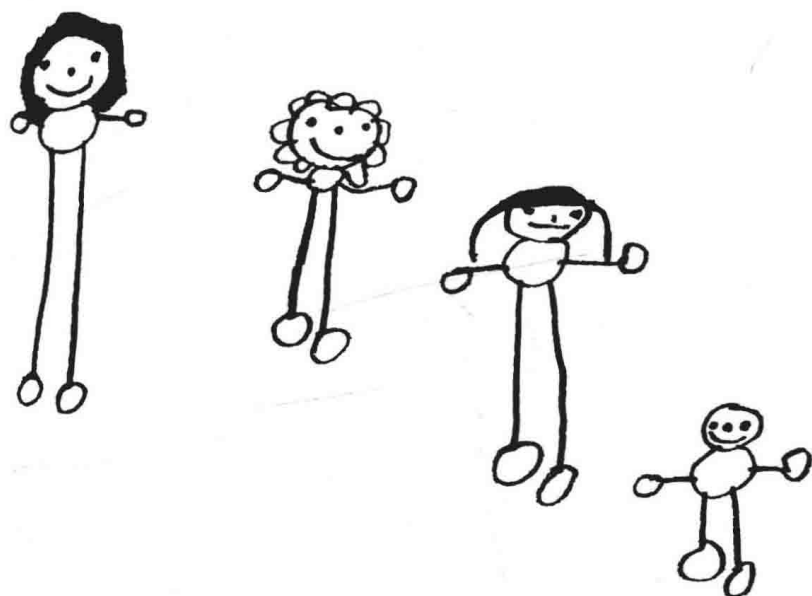
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Introduction



When Freud began to develop his ideas about gender development at the turn of the century, it was taken for granted that men and women were different. In all of Freud's theorizing on the subject it was assumed that psychological differences between the sexes stemmed from differences in reproductive function. The roles of women as homemakers and child rearers and of men as breadwinners were never questioned. Neither was the assumption that the presence of both a mother and a father was necessary for children's gender development to proceed in a "normal" fashion.

As large numbers of women began to enter the work force to help with the war effort in the 1940s, the notion of "biology as destiny" was challenged. It was now argued that reproductive function need not determine gender roles; just because women

experience pregnancy and childbirth does not mean that their lives must be limited to housework and child care, and just because men cannot give birth does not mean that they are unable to perform a nurturing role. With the growth of the women's movement and the gay liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, new types of families emerged in which parents played less traditional roles. An increasing number of children were brought up in families where the mother worked outside the home, in one-parent families, in stepfamilies and in a wide variety of other living arrangements. More radical changes to family structure also took place with the emergence, albeit in relatively small numbers, of families in which fathers shared domestic work and child care and of families headed by two parents of the same sex.

As we approach the twenty-first century, a situation has arisen that was inconceivable just a few years ago: It is no longer necessary for a woman to experience pregnancy, or to have sex with a man, in order to have a child. The development of the reproductive technologies has enabled a woman's egg to be fertilized with a man's sperm in the laboratory, and the embryo to be implanted into the womb of another woman who will "host" the pregnancy. When the child is born, it is genetically related to the couple who provided the egg and the sperm, just as if they had produced their child in the usual way.

In spite of the loosening ties between reproductive and social roles, the worlds of men and women, and boys and girls, are clearly not the same. We have learned that there is much more to being female or male than our potential to mother or father a child. We have also learned that gender development does not simply depend on our relationship with our parents; it results from a complex interaction between the individual and the wider social environment, of which parents are just one part. In this book we examine the processes that determine gender development. We look at how gender differences come about, why they persist, and the consequences at different stages of our lives. Our aim is not to provide a comprehensive account of the ways in which males and females differ. Instead, it is to explore from the perspective of developmental psychology the mechanisms

through which these differences arise. But, first, what do we mean by gender development?

Definitions

Many different terms are used to refer to various aspects of gender development. Anyone who has read even a very few articles on this topic is likely to have encountered "gender identity," "gender role," "sex role," "sex typed," "sexual orientation," "sex role orientation," and "sexual identity," to name but a few. To make matters even more confusing, different authors use identical terms to refer to different aspects of behavior, or sometimes the same behaviors are described by different terms.

The appropriate use of *sex* and *gender* has probably raised the greatest controversy. Some authors argue that sex should be restricted to a person's biological maleness or femaleness, and gender for the social traits and characteristics that are associated with each sex (Deaux, 1985; Unger, 1979). The term sex implies a biological basis for a behavior when none necessarily exists. Maccoby (1988), on the other hand, believes that sex and gender should be used interchangeably because biological and social aspects of sex may interact with each other and it is difficult to distinguish between the two. Following Maccoby, we use both terms here, without any assumption that sex implies biological causes or that gender results from socialization. For example, "gender role" and "gender difference" are used interchangeably with "sex role" and "sex difference," respectively.

A distinction is generally made among the terms gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation. *Gender identity* is a person's concept of him- or herself as male or female, as reflected in the statements "I am a boy" or "I am a girl". *Gender role* includes the behaviors and attitudes considered appropriate for males or females in a particular culture. *Sexual orientation* refers to a person's sexual attraction toward a person of the other sex (heterosexual sexual orientation) or the same sex (lesbian or gay male sexual orientation). People sexually attracted toward both women and men are bisexual.

Biological sex, gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation are separate aspects of maleness and femaleness that may relate to each other in different ways. Gender identity is almost always in line with biological sex, so that biological males develop a male gender identity and biological females develop a female gender identity. For a very small minority of individuals – transsexuals – the two do not match. When this happens, a person who is physically male feels that “he” is really a “she” or, in the less common case of a person with a female body and a male gender identity, that “she” is really a “he.” Male-to-female transsexuals (who are physically male) often describe themselves as “a woman trapped in a man’s body,” and vice versa for female-to-male transsexuals (who are physically female). Sometimes transsexual men and women adopt the gender role and clothing of their desired sex. They may also wish to have sex-reassignment surgery to give them the physical characteristics of the sex they wish to be. The sexual orientation of transsexual men and women may be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. Thus heterosexual female-to-male transsexuals are sexually attracted to women, and heterosexual male-to-female transsexuals are sexually attracted to men.

For the vast majority of people whose gender identity is consistent with their biological sex, gender identity is linked to gender role, although the extent of the association between the two varies from person to person. Some girls with a female gender identity may show feminine gender role behavior in terms of the way they dress and the activities they prefer, and others may have interests that are more commonly associated with boys. But girls who prefer Batman to Barbie are quite sure that they are girls. Just because boys and girls do not adhere to prescribed gender roles does not mean that they are uncertain about their gender identity.

Knowing a person’s sexual orientation does not tell us about that person’s gender role. Lesbian women may show traditionally feminine or traditionally masculine gender role behavior, just like heterosexual women, and the same is true of gay and heterosexual men. Whatever a person’s sexual orientation, his or her gender identity and biological sex remain in line (unless the

person is transsexual). Thus lesbian women, like heterosexual women, have no doubt that they are female, and gay men, like heterosexual men, have no doubt that they are male. The gender identity of most bisexual men and women also matches their biological sex.

Two other terms that you will come across in this book are sex typing and sex stereotypes. *Sex typing* refers to the extent to which a person conforms to prescribed male and female gender roles. Boys who love rough sports, fighting, and playing with cars, trucks, and guns are considered to be very sex typed, as are girls who love dolls and playing house. It is important to remember that there is a great deal of overlap between the preferred activities and interests of boys and girls, although girls are more likely to enjoy "boyish" activities than boys are to enjoy "girlish" ones. *Sex stereotypes* are the characteristics generally believed to be typical of men and women or boys and girls. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the sex stereotypes that abound may bear little resemblance to the behavior and attitudes of men and women in the real world.

It is perhaps surprising that the two gender-related terms psychologists seem to have the most difficulty in defining are those commonly used in everyday conversation — *masculinity* and *femininity*. In fact, the concepts of masculinity and femininity have been described as among the muddiest in the psychologist's vocabulary (Constantinople, 1973). Why are they so difficult to define and measure?

Measurement issues

Psychologists have been engaged in the measurement of masculinity and femininity since the 1930s. In the early measures, such as the Terman-Miles Test of M-F (Terman & Miles, 1936), it was assumed that masculinity and femininity lie along a single, bipolar dimension ranging from extreme masculinity at one end to extreme femininity at the other. According to this approach, masculinity and femininity are mutually exclusive, so that a person who is masculine is, by definition, not feminine. In constructing

these measures it was also assumed that so long as a question was answered differently by men and women it could be included in the scale, regardless of whether or not it related to commonly held beliefs about appropriate male and female roles.

Many of the assumptions underlying the construction of these early measures were later challenged (Constantinople, 1973; Huston, 1983). It was questioned whether masculinity–femininity forms a single, bipolar dimension. Instead, the proposal was made that there may be two separate dimensions of masculinity and femininity that are independent of each other. This meant that the two need not be opposites, and that a person could be both masculine and feminine at the same time. Another criticism was that masculinity and femininity are broad, multidimensional concepts that cannot adequately be measured by a single score. It was also thought to be inappropriate to include a question in a masculinity–femininity scale simply on the ground that men and women respond to it differently. This issue has often been highlighted by pointing to an item in an early masculinity–femininity scale that asked whether the respondent prefers to take a bath or a shower. Because a sex difference exists in response to this question, with men preferring showers and women preferring baths, the response “shower” is scored in the masculine direction and “bath” as feminine.

Dissatisfaction with the traditional view of masculinity and femininity as opposite ends of a continuum gave rise in the 1970s to the development of measures of androgyny that treated masculinity and femininity as two independent dimensions. The most well-known instruments are the Bem Sex Role Inventory, or BSRI (Bem, 1974, 1977), and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, or PAQ (Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974, 1975). The term *androgyny*, from the Greek *andro* (man) and *gyne* (woman), refers to people who show both masculine and feminine characteristics. The earlier scales could not measure androgyny because they were unable to differentiate a person who was high on both masculinity and femininity from a person who was low on these characteristics; both obtained a similar score at the midpoint of the scale.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (see the sample in Table 1.1)

Table 1.1. *Selection of items from the Bem Sex Role Inventory*

Masculine items	Feminine items
Independent	Affectionate
Forceful	Compassionate
Ambitious	Warm
Aggressive	Gentle

Source: Bem (1974).

consists of 20 characteristics judged to be more desirable for a man than a woman (aggressive, competitive, dominant), 20 characteristics more desirable for a woman than a man (gentle, understanding, tender), and 20 characteristics equally desirable for men and women (loyal, friendly, theatrical). Respondents are asked to rate themselves on a 7-point scale ranging from *never or almost never true of me* to *always or almost always true of me*. The inventory produces a score on a masculinity scale as well as a score on a femininity scale, and respondents are classified as androgynous if they obtain a high score on both, as masculine if they have a high score on the masculinity scale and a low score on the femininity scale, as feminine if they have a high femininity and a low masculinity score, and as undifferentiated if both scores are low.

The Personal Attributes Questionnaire also contains a masculinity scale with items judged to be more characteristic of males than females and a femininity scale with items judged to be more characteristic of females than males (see the sample in Table 1.2). It differs from the Bem Sex Role Inventory in that the items in its masculinity and femininity scales are considered to be socially desirable in both sexes.

Although androgyny questionnaires were greeted enthusiastically as an alternative to the earlier unidimensional scales, it was not long before it became apparent that the new measures were also problematic. A fundamental difficulty is that the theory on which the new measures were based has not stood up to

Table 1.2. *Selection of items from the Personal Attributes Questionnaire*

Male valued	Female valued
Active	Emotional
Adventurous	Kind
Outspoken	Considerate
Intellectual	Creative

Source: Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975).

empirical testing. Bem (1974) and Spence et al. (1975) have argued that androgynous people are better adjusted as a result of their ability to engage in both masculine and feminine behaviors and to switch easily between the two. This is in direct contrast to the earlier assumption that the outcome of successful socialization is the adoption of conventional sex role behavior. Though many studies have confirmed a positive relationship between androgyny and psychological adjustment, and also between androgyny and self-esteem, closer examination of the findings has shown that it is the high masculinity score, rather than the combination of high masculinity with high femininity, that is important for psychological well-being (Taylor & Hall, 1982; Whitely, 1983). Masculinity, it seems, benefits both women and men, whereas androgyny holds no additional advantage. Still, we should not place too much emphasis on this conclusion. Because of the similarity between masculinity items and items used to assess self-esteem, it is not surprising that a strong relationship has been found between the two.

In recent years attention has turned to an examination of what the masculinity–femininity scales are actually measuring. Although they were constructed to produce global measures of these concepts, it appears that the scales are really measuring rather narrower aspects of masculinity, such as instrumentality, self-assertiveness, or dominance, and of femininity, such as expressiveness, nurturance, or interpersonal orientation. Gender-related characteristics are multidimensional in nature (Spence,