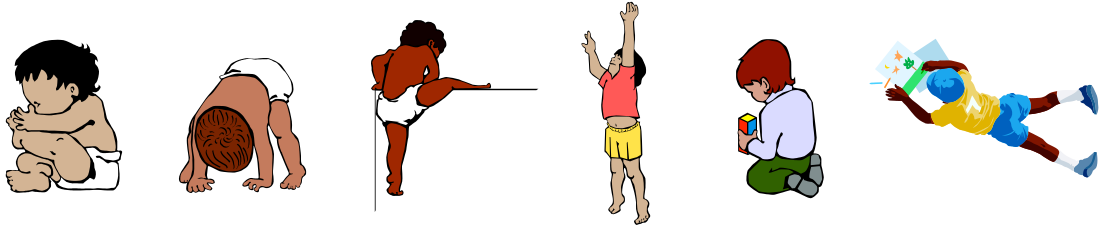


Gender Development



Gender Identity

You can expect to be examined on the following topics (and relevant background theories/empirical studies):

- I. Definitions of sex/gender
- II. Patterns and theories of gender development
- III. Individual differences in gender development
- IV. Influences on gender identity (including TV and other media)

I. Definitions of sex/gender

Sex is a reference to some biological aspect of the person. It comprises part of our physical status (just like *height* and *weight*). Seemingly straightforward, the difference between male and female is often taken as being indicated by external genitalia. However, there are notable cases which make even this distinction between male and female less clear. According to Gross (1992) there are five different factors which affect our categorisation as male or female:

- i. chromosomal sex (XX female and XY male)
- ii. gonadal sex (reproductive organs, ovaries in female, testes in male)
- iii. hormonal sex (differences in the secretions of the endocrine systems which control how bodies develop and function; male hormones are androgens including testosterone and female hormones are oestrogen and progesterone. All are produced by all of us but in most people there's more male than female or more female than male.)
- iv. internal accessory organs (all the other bits and pieces surrounding the gonads, such as fallopian tubes, womb, sperm ducts and prostate gland.)
- v. function and appearance of external genitalia

Some interesting cases make us question a clear-cut distinction. *Mr Blackwell* was a hermaphrodite in that he had sexual attributes of both sexes. He had a small vaginal opening and a penis as a child. In puberty he developed breasts and was found to have an active ovary on one side and an active testicle on the other side. (He wanted to be male so he had surgery to remove his female parts). Imperato-McGinley et al (1974) tell us about the *Batista Family* from the Caribbean. Four of the children were born girls with normal female genitalia and developed into muscular men through puberty when their vaginas closed and full-size penises developed. There are 23 similarly affected families in their village. It seems that they all have a common ancestor who passed on a mutant gene which only shows when both parents have it.

Gender is the way in which we classify ourselves in social terms as male or female. It is the social interpretation of sex. If sex is innate and predetermined, gender is acquired, constructed or assigned. Hence it is less distinct than male and female. People can be strongly feminine or strongly masculine but most people have a mixture of these traits (Bem 1974). **Gender role** refers to the behaviours, attitudes and expectations that correspond to our gender. **Gender role stereotypes** are beliefs about what masculine and feminine people are supposed to be like. In perceiving others this is often run together with their sex and so amounts to **sex-role stereotyping** too, expecting males to behave, feel etc. in masculine ways and females to behave, feel etc. in feminine ways. This can lead to **sex-typing** where males and females are treated differently. The interesting question is whether *sex-typing* leads to gender differences or whether *sex differences* lead to gender differences, assuming that there are measurable gender differences.

II. Patterns and theories of gender development

There seems to be a pattern in which children develop *awareness of gender identity and sex differences*. This appears to happen in three steps (Kohlberg 1967, Thompson 1975, Archer et al 1989, Bee 1992).

I. Gender identity:	child can label self correctly as male or female and can identify others as male or female by 24 to 30 months old (Thompson 1975)
II. Gender stability:	child understands that a person's gender stays the same throughout life by about 4 years (Slaby and Frey 1975)
III. Gender constancy :	child understands that even though all indicators of gender may change, a person's gender itself doesn't change (Munroe et al 1984)

There are several theories concerning the development of gender and you should be able to outline each of these: - social learning theory, cognitive developmental theory, psychoanalytic theory and biological explanations.

Social Learning Theory (SLT) account

A combination of learning theory and psychoanalysis, Bandura's (1961) SLT argues that we learn our gender from watching, **imitating, identifying** with and interacting with **significant others** in our environment. **Observational learning** tells the young child what males and females, boys and girls do in certain situations and so the child who is able to self-label comes to know which behaviours/attitudes are **sex-appropriate**. Behaviour and attitudes which others see as being apt for the young child will be reinforced directly through success or praise and reinforced indirectly through the child identifying with the model and gaining a sense of pride at this. Behaviour and attitudes which are deemed inappropriate will be unrewarded or punished in a similar manner. Notice that in SLT the child does not need to act in order to learn sex-appropriateness. Non-acting couch potatoes will still learn that aggressive men seem to get what they want if they see a TV hero being rewarded as a result of aggression. See below for the effects of TV (and other media) on gender development.

Cognitive-developmental theory

Kohlberg (1966) suggests that we develop genders in much the same way as we develop any other knowledge of the world. Just as learning that big things on top of little things are unstable involves concepts of size and stability (which are learnt as we develop cognitive abilities) so concepts of our own gender arise once we have grasped gender identity, stability and constancy (see above). Weinraub et al (1984) point out that by two years old children already associate certain tasks with men and women, showing that they have concepts of the tasks, of gender differences and of appropriateness. Similarly by the age of 5 children are starting to pair personality traits with gender. Interestingly, children in different cultures tend to associate the same traits in stereotypical ways (Williams and Best 1990).

Psychoanalytic theory

Freud suggests that boys and girls develop their genders differently as a result of different kinds of interaction between their own biological natures and figures in their social world, namely their parents or parent-

figures. Freud gives an explanation of gender differences in terms of the Oedipal conflict for boys and the Electra conflict for girls which is based upon the child being aware of sexual desire at about three years old.

Oedipal complex in boys	Electra complex in girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The young boy about three years old starts to have passionate feeling towards his mother. • This leads to conflict with the father and the boy is initially jealous of him. • The boy realises the father is a threat to him and the biggest threat centres around the feelings that have caused the father to become a threat, namely sexual desire. The boy's greatest fear is castration by the father. • The boy has to cope with the anxiety caused by desire for mother and fear of father and does so by denying both using elaborate defence mechanisms. He represses his desire and appeases father by becoming like him. In this way he has indirect access to mother too. • It is through this identification with the aggressor that the young boy becomes masculine i.e. acquires a gender. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The young girl has an affectionate attachment to the mother. • She realises she does not have a penis and blames the one person who has a vested interest in her not having one, her mother. • She feels inadequate for not having a penis, wants one (penis envy) and is attracted to her father who does have one. • This brings the girl into conflict with mother and she fears the loss of her mother's love. • The girl has to cope with the anxiety caused by desire for her father ('s penis) and fear of loss of love and does so by defence mechanisms. She represses her desire for her father and gains her mother's affection by becoming like her. • In this way the 'family romance' can continue. • It is through this anaclitic identification that the young girl becomes feminine i.e. acquires a gender.

Freud's theory depends upon the child being in an environment where differential sex-roles are already well established, traditionally in a nuclear family of feminine mother, masculine father and the child(ren). Some have criticised his theory on the grounds of this contingency (Hoeffler 1981, Kirkpatrick et al 1981, Green 1978). Nevertheless, it would be difficult to remove a child entirely from such stereotyped ideas. An implication of his theory is that if the child is unable to go through the conflict (perhaps because the relevant threats are not there due to the family being one-parent or homosexual) then the child should grow up with

an unclear sexual identity. Golombok et al (1983) studied 37 children aged 5 to 17 years old from 27 lesbian households compared with 38 children of the same ages from heterosexual households. They found that there were the same variations between the two groups in terms of gender identity or emotional/behavioural stability.

Biological explanations

Not surprisingly, biological theories of gender explain differences in terms that reduce them to anatomical differences. Any social differences only come about because they are built upon fundamental biological differences. These differences have already been outlined above under five categories. Some would argue that such a reductionist account of gender does not sufficiently take into account the great flexibility that humans have in choosing their behaviours, compared with other animals. According to Hayes (1994), "looking at human gender behaviour purely as a result of biological sex is not very likely to provide us with a full explanation." (p751)

III. Individual differences in gender development

Whilst there may be areas where there are clear gender differences in development (such as aggression and language), Bee (1992) points out that *within each sex* there is almost a full range of behaviours in any particular area. It is a simplification to say that girls are such-and-such (and vice versa) because there will be some boys who behave in this way too. So the repertoire of behaviours that is shown by boys will be pretty much the same as that shown by girls. The differences then are not so much to do with behaviours/attitudes etc. but with *frequencies* of such behaviours/attitudes within the two groups (boys and girls). Since some boys develop language earlier than some girls despite the fact that girls on average are faster than boys in this, the following comparisons are clearly normative (i.e. comparing that which statistically happens most frequently).

Table adapted from Bee (1992 p 592)

		Girls	Boys
Cognitive development:	<i>Verbal skills</i>	slightly faster in early stages, better articulation, more verbal reasoning in adolescence	more reading problems
	<i>IQ</i>	no differences	
	<i>mathematical skills</i>	slightly better at arithmetic before adolescence	at adolescence, slightly better at mathematical reasoning
	<i>spatial ability</i>		better at spatial visualisation, larger difference at adolescence
Social development:	<i>aggression/ competitiveness</i>		more aggressive/competitive from an early age through to adulthood
	<i>nurturance</i>	few differences, girls slightly more caring where differences found	
	<i>interactive style</i>	intimate friendships, supportive girl-girl	boy-boy interactions more competitive
Perceptual development:	<i>no sex differences in any areas</i>		
Other differences:	<i>Vulnerability</i>	higher rate of depression at adolescence	more physical, emotional and cognitive vulnerability to stress

Atkinson et al (1990) suggest that sex differences in cognitive abilities (observed over several decades) appear to be diminishing. Feingold (1988) found that such differences decreased progressively from 1947 to 1980. For instance, male verbal ability is on the increase as is female

mathematical reasoning (Hyde et al 1988). This may well be due to changing expectations in society.

Of course, one methodological problem with cross-sectional and longitudinal studies is the difficulty of standardisation. If the measuring instrument (e.g. IQ test) was standardised on 1940s boys, its validity for 1980s girls must surely be questioned. If the test changes, how can we be certain that differences between the groups are due to real differences and are not caused by the test differences?

IV. Influences on gender development

In 1987, 4 to 7 year olds watched an average of 2.8 hours of TV per day (Broadcasters Audience Research Board) and 8 to 11 year olds watched 3.3 hours in comparison with 2.4 and 2.9 hours in 1982. Find some more up-to-date figures and it would be surprising if the trend had reversed. It would seem obvious that TV will have an influence on those who watch it (Why else would we watch it?) and one influence might be on the development of gender identity. Gunter (1986) found that children who were categorised (by themselves and their parents) as watching a lot of TV have stronger sex-stereotypes than those who do not watch so much. Frueh and McGee (1975) found a positive correlation between the amount of TV watched and children's stereotyped choice of toy. Not only are we unable to infer cause from a correlation, a range of significant variables is not considered in this study. For example, the role of the parent in teaching the child and in interpreting the TV images is not examined, nor are the children's reasons for watching the TV in the first place. It could be that strongly sex-stereotyping children are more attracted to TV than others in the first place. Williams (1986) explored a causal relation between TV and sex-stereotyping by children, the idea that TV teaches them how to stereotype. He found that children who start with no exposure to TV (because they live in relatively isolated communities in Canada) but after two years living with one channel do become significantly more stereotyped themselves. In Britain, children perceive some jobs as being done primarily by women and others by men on TV (Wober et al 1987).

Child-rearing methods also contribute to gender differences. Sears et al (1957) found that boys were permitted to show more aggression than girls, but is this because boys are more aggressive by nature? Condry and Condry (1976) asked adults to describe one child's reaction to a jack-in-the-box. When the child was described as a girl, 'she' was said to show fear and when the child was described as a boy, 'he' was said to show anger. Adults clearly have expectations about children based solely on their perceived

gender. Frisch (1977) observed that adults who believed a fourteen month old child was male encouraged more activity and when female interacted in a more nurturant way.

The conundrum remains as to whether girls and boys are sex-typed in particular, but different, ways **causes** them to acquired different gender identities or whether girls and boys behaving in different ways **causes** them to be sex-typed differently. Since we cannot sort out cause-and-effect from the correlational evidence, the conundrum remains, how do gender differences actually come about?