

Explanations of Gender:

Freud proposed the Oedipus Conflict which occurs during the Phallic Stage of Psycho-sexual development: Freud considered this to be a very important stage as it is the stage that role modelling of the same sex parent occurs. At about this age a child discovers the genitalia as a source of pleasure. If over cathected a child is thought to become selfish and narcissistic. At the same time the Oedipus complex develops.

When a child enters the phallic stage of development he or she desires sexual gratification from the opposite sex parent. However, he/she fears the anger of the same sex parent. In other words the Id desires the sexual gratification, but the superego knows that this is wrong. The ego, therefore, devises a strategy that overcomes the conflict. This strategy is to identify with the parent of the same sex, using them as a role model, and in this way receiving a type of 'second hand' sexual gratification. In boys this is known as the Oedipus Complex and in girls the Electra Complex.

Freud can be criticised on a number of accounts:

1. If Freud is correct then we should see all children developing sex-role & sex-behaviour at about the same age, that of four. In fact this is not the case, in fact most research shows that children develop this strong sex role behaviour some years later.
2. It also does not explain how children as young as 2 years old start to play with gender stereotyped toys.

Social-Learning Theory:

The main proponent of this approach is Walter Mischel who suggested during the 60's and 70's that the learning of the appropriate gender behaviour was a result of the encouragement and reward given by parents. In other words, parents will reward boys for playing with appropriate toys or helping dad in the garden and the same for girls who fulfil appropriate female behaviours. This encouragement even extends to parents buying appropriate toys etc. before sex role behaviour has occurred. There is some evidence (Siegal, 1987) that fathers are more

likely to encourage appropriate behaviour in their sons than in their daughters and that fathers do this more than mothers. This might explain why male sex-role behaviour occurs earlier than that in females.

Two other pieces of evidence show support for the social-learning model.

1. Whiting (1988) in an investigation of 11 countries showed that children from an early age tend to spend more time with the same sex individuals, children as well as adults. In other words, she was suggesting that: "we are the company that we keep".

2. Maccoby (1990) demonstrated that children as young as 3 or 4 try to influence each other's behaviour. However, boys and girls do it differently, boys tend to be more demanding, whereas girls will ask. The interesting thing is that boys tend to react positively to the demands of other boys but do not react well to the asking of girls. Also, boys at this age tend to indulge in more rough and tumble play which girls do not like so much and therefore will avoid contact with boys.

There are however, a number of criticisms of this approach:

1. There is actually less differential treatment of children than you would imagine.
2. As with the psychoanalytical approach children do not start to consistently behave in stereotyped ways until later in their development.

What 2 shows is that children develop an idea of sex-role without actually imitating these behaviours.

An interesting piece of research by Beverley Fagot (1985) showed that in nursery school, teachers tend to reinforce those behaviours that are more appropriate for girls, e.g. helpfulness, quieter play etc., nevertheless boys persisted in male type behaviour. In fact they would only change their behaviour if disapproval or approval was shown by other boys!

What this shows is that reinforcement patterns and modelling are important, but there is more going on here than can be accounted for by social learning theory.

It is clear that children respond to reinforcement. It is only to be expected that behaviours that are rewarded will occur more frequently and that those that are not will eventually disappear from a child's repertoire. It is also to be expected that children will imitate behaviour, especially if they see that behaviour resulting in some sort of reward. However, children also learn to identify themselves as belonging to one or the other sex and once they have identified themselves then they can start to model their behaviour on significant others. What is important is that they must identify themselves first and the cognitive psychologist Kohlberg had something to say about this.

Cognitive-Developmental Explanations:

Lawrence Kohlberg (1966) offered a third alternative, grounded in Piagetian theory. Kohlberg argued that until the child has fully grasped the constancy of gender, we shouldn't see very much sex-typed behaviour, and we certainly shouldn't see much imitation of same-sex models (modelling).

Kohlberg suggests that children go through three stages of gender identification and that there is a gradual progression to a state when a child knows that he/she is a particular sex and that they are going to remain that way:

The Development of the Gender Concept:

This process appears to be gradual, taking three stages:

1. **Gender Identity:** a child's ability to identify itself as a boy or a girl. Children appear to be able to identify the external differences at 15-18 months, by 2 years they can place themselves as boy or girl, i.e. when shown pictures and asked "Which one is you?" correctly point to a boy or girl. By 30-36 months they can correctly identify the sex of others in photos. It seems that hair length and clothing are the clues. (Thompson, 1975).
2. **Gender Stability:** the idea that you remain the same sex! Karin Frey (1975) estimated that this idea of permanence developed at about four years of age. She asked children questions like:

“When you were a baby were you a little boy or girl?” or “When you grow up will you be a Mummy or a Daddy?”

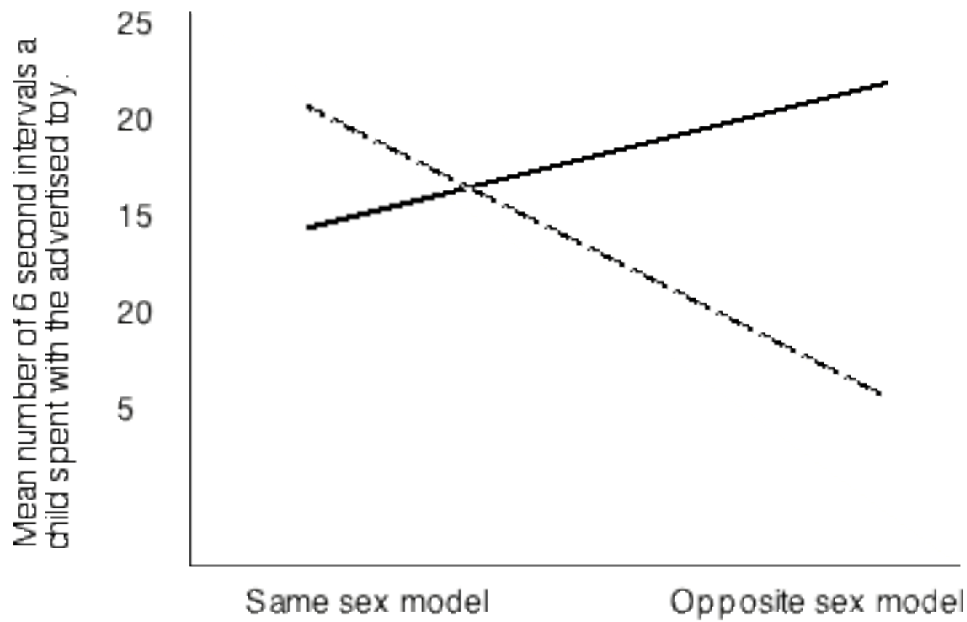
Gender Consistency: this is the idea that gender remains the same regardless of someone doing things like cutting their hair or changing their clothing. It may seem odd that children can have gender stability, but not consistency. However, several studies have revealed this phenomenon and it appears to be linked to conservation. *Gender constancy* appears to be a type of “Gender conservation”. Marcus & Overton (1978) produced the following results from questioning children:

Pattern of Constancy and Conservation	Child's Grade in School		
	Kindergarten	First	Second
Child has neither gender constancy nor conservation of quantity	17	4	1
Child has conservation but not gender constancy	3	4	4
Child has both	4	14	18

Once the child has understood the gender concept, however, and realises that he is a boy or she is a girl forever, then in order to maintain cognitive consistency it becomes highly important for the child to learn how to behave in a way that fits the category he or she belongs to. Thus Kohlberg predicted that we should see systematic same-sex imitation only after the child has shown full gender constancy.

A study by Diane Ruble is a good example (Ruble, 1981) that supports this view.

She showed 4 to 6 year old children a cartoon with a "commercial" in the middle. The commercial showed either two girls playing with a toy or two boys playing with the same toy. After seeing the cartoon, each child was encouraged to play with any of the toys in the room, which included the toy he or she had seen during the commercial. The results are summarised in the graph below:



As you can see children who had already achieved full gender constancy were much more influenced by the gender of the models in the commercial than were children who were at earlier levels of development of the gender concept.

However, Kohlberg's approach still has weaknesses, the most glaring of which is the fact that children show clear signs of sex-typed behaviour many years before they have fully grasped gender constancy. Two and three year olds show sex-appropriate toy and playmate choice at a point when they barely can label their own and others' genders accurately.

A New Alternative: Gender Schemas

These various theoretical deficiencies have led a number of psychologists to propose a new alternative, usually called gender schema theory, that combines many of the best features of social-learning and cognitive-developmental theories (e.g., Bem, 1981; Martin & Halverson, 1981, 1983; Ruble, 1987)

Just as the self-concept can be thought of as a "scheme" or "self-theory," so the child's understanding of gender can be seen in the same way. As Carol Martin and Charles Halverson put it:

The basic idea [is] that stereotypes are "schemas," or naive theories that are relevant to the self, and function to organise and structure experience by telling the perceiver the kinds of information to look for in the environment and how to interpret such information. (Martin & Halverson, 1983, p. 563)

The gender schema begins to develop as soon as the child notices the differences between male and female, knows his own gender, and can label the two groups with some consistency all of which happens by age 2 or 3. Perhaps because gender is clearly an either/or category, children seem to understand very early that this is a key distinction, so the category serves as a kind of magnet for new information (Maccoby, 1988). In Piaget's terms, once the child has established even a primitive gender scheme, a great many experiences are assimilated to it. Thus as soon as this schema begins to be formed, children may begin to show preference for same-sex playmates or for gender-stereotyped activities (Martin, Wood, & Little, 1990).

It seems that the schemas develop in three stages:

1. Preschoolers seem to learn some broad distinctions about what sort of activities go with the different genders.
2. Between 4 & 6 children seem to focus on the more complex and subtle behaviours that apply to their own gender.
3. Between 8 & 10 children start to learn the more complex behaviours that are appropriate for the opposite gender.

(Martin, Wood & Little, 1990)

The advantage of this explanation is that it does not assume that the child must have learnt gender constancy in order to behave in an appropriate manner.

Individual Differences in Sex Role & Stereotypes:

Children do not all develop sex stereotypes to the same degree. For example, boys tend to have more rigidly defined sex role patterns than

girls and children whose mothers go out to work have less rigidly defined sex role behaviours. Why do you think this is?

Cross-Sex Children:

These are children with cross sex preferences. Why is it that some girls prefer to be like boys and visa versa?

It could be they have been trained that way, by encouragement and reinforcement. However, Roberts et al. (1987) have shed some doubt