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GENDER AND PSYCHOLOGY

A gender role is a theoretical construct in the social sciences and humanities that refers to a set of social and behavioral norms that, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. Socially accepted gender roles differ widely between different cultures. Proponents of gender role theory assert that observed gender differences in behavior and personality characteristics are, at least in part, socially constructed, and therefore, the product of socialization experiences; this contrasts with other models of gender that assert that gender differences are "essential" to biological sex. Gender differences exist in almost all societies. With differences in the norms adopted, this suggests that gender differences are, at least partly, influenced by culture.

What is gender? Gender is the range of physical, biological, mental and behavioral characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, the term may refer to biological sex (i.e. the state of being male, female or intersex), sex-based social structures (including gender roles and other social roles), or gender identity [2].

The study of gender took off in the 1970s. During this time period, academic works were published reflecting the changing views of researchers towards gender studies. Some of these works included textbooks, as they were an important way that information was compiled and made sense of the new field. In 1978 *Women and sex roles: A social psychological perspective* was published, one of the first textbooks on the psychology behind women and sex roles. Another textbook to be

published, *Gender and Communication*, was the first textbook to discuss the topic of its subject [1].

Other influential academic works focused on the development of gender. In 1966, *The Development of Sex Differences* was published. This book went into what factors influence a child's gender development, with contributors proposing the effects of hormones, social learning, and cognitive development in respective chapters. *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl*, by John Money was published in 1972, reported findings of research done with intersex subjects. In 1974, *The Psychology of Sex Differences* was published [1]. It said that men and women behave more similarly than had been previously supposed. They also proposed that children have much power over what gender role they grow into, whether by choosing which parent to imitate, or doing activities such as playing with action figures or dolls. These works added new knowledge to the field of gender psychology [3].

Biological differentiation is fundamental in determining differences in males and females. Males have two different sex chromosomes, an X and a Y. Females have two X chromosomes. The Y chromosome is what determines sexual differentiation. If the Y chromosome is present, growth is along male lines [1].

The biological approach states that the distinction between men and women are due to inherent and hormonal differences. This approach assumes that there really is not much room for sexual expression other than the one they are given by their biological makeup. It portrays people as having their gender role already decided by biology as either male or female at birth.

Literature

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