

Social Psychology

Lesson 5: Genes, Culture and Gender

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Topics:

- Cultural Diversity
- Cultural Similarity
- How Males and Females are Alike
- Culture and Gender

Expected Learning Outcomes

- ☑ Explain how we are influenced by human nature and cultural diversity.
- ☑ Outline the shared and unique attributes of males and females.
- ☑ Analyze how social norms and cultural expectations shape the development of gender roles and identities.
- ☑ Evaluate the interaction between biological constraints and cultural adaptation.

EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY

- Studies how natural selection predisposes not just physical traits suited to particular contexts but also psychological traits and social behaviors that enhance the preservation and spread of one's genes.

COMMON INSTINCTS:

- **Trust and Cooperation** – deciding who is an ally and who is a threat.
- **Social Hierarchy** – recognizing who is in charge and how to gain influence.
- **Reproduction** – finding and choosing the right mate.
- **Altruism** – determining when it is beneficial to help someone else
- **Fear** – figuring out what is truly dangerous versus what just feels scary.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

1. Individual Choices

2. Punctuality

3. Rule-breaking

4. Personal space



1. Individual Choices

- Individualistic cultures, which is common among Westerns, prioritize the individual self. People are generally encouraged to make their own choices regarding their careers, education, and personal lives with significant personal freedom.
- Collectivistic cultures, which is common among Eastern, prioritize "others and society." Individual choices are often secondary to the expectations and needs of the family or community.

2. Punctuality

Monochronic Cultures

- e.g., Germany, Switzerland, North America
- Time is seen as a linear commodity that can be "spent," "saved," or "wasted."
- Punctuality is a sign of respect and efficiency.
- Schedules are rigid; "Time is money."

Polychronic Cultures

- e.g., Latin America, Middle East, Africa
- Time is seen as fluid and circular.
- Relationships take priority over schedules. If a conversation is going well, it is considered rude to cut it short just to be "on time" for the next appointment. Being "late" is often viewed as being "flexible."

3. Rule-breaking

Tight Cultures

- Characterized by very clear social expectations and low tolerance for those who don't follow them.
- "Rule-breaking" extends beyond legalities to include personal choices like fashion or diet that make an individual stand out.
- e.g., Korea, Japan, Singapore

In many collectivistic (often "tight") cultures, there is a strong belief that violating social norms leads to personal misfortune, such as contracting a disease or other forms of human suffering.

Loose Cultures

- Possess flexible social norms and a high level of acceptance for "doing your own thing."
- Differences are celebrated as expressions of individuality rather than being viewed as a threat to the community.
- e.g., United States, Netherlands, New Zealand

4. Personal space

- **Personal space** is a sort of portable bubble or buffer zone that we like to maintain between ourselves and others.
- Most Americans prefer a gap of at least 4 feet with strangers, though they allow friends to enter a much smaller "inner circle."
- For reasons unknown, cultures near the equator prefer less space and more touching and hugging.

CULTURAL SIMILARITY

- 1. Universal Friendship Norms**
- 2. Universal Trait Dimensions**
- 3. Universal Social Belief Dimensions**
- 4. Universal Status Norms**
- 5. The Incest Taboo**

1. Universal Friendship Norms

Regardless of where you live, most people agree that a good friend should:

- respect the friend's privacy
- make eye contact while talking
- don't divulge things said in confidence

2. Universal Trait Dimensions

People everywhere generally categorize others using two to five core personality traits, commonly known as the Big Five proposed by McCrae & Costa in 2008. These traits are:

1. Openness to Experience
2. Conscientiousness
3. Extraversion
4. Agreeableness
5. Neuroticism (Emotional Stability)

The most basic human judgment, evaluating whether someone is "good" or "bad", exists in almost every culture and language.

3. Universal Social Belief Dimensions

Research by Leung and Bond (2004) identified five universal dimensions of social beliefs that people in nearly every culture use to navigate life. People's adherence to these social beliefs appears to guide their living. Across 38 countries, people varied in:

1. Cynicism
2. Social Complexity
3. Reward for Application
4. Spirituality
5. Fate Control

4. Universal Status Norms

- People generally speak to those of higher status with the same formal respect they show strangers.
- People address those of lower status using familiar language and first names.
- The person with the "most power" gets to decide when to stop being formal.
- Casual behaviors, such as touching someone on the shoulder or borrowing a personal item, are socially acceptable when directed toward subordinates or friends, but are considered inappropriate when directed toward a superior.
- Invitations to private spaces usually flow from the top down.

5. The Incest Taboo

- The prohibition against incest (sexual relations between parents/children or siblings) is the most well-known universal norm, found in every society.
- Evolutionary psychologists believe this norm exists to prevent "inbreeding," which causes genetic disorders.
- Humans are naturally predisposed to avoid it for the survival of the species.

**How are
males and
females alike
and different?**



A. Gender and Genes

- In terms of genetic makeup, out of 46 human chromosomes, 45 are "unisex."
- Boys and girls reach physical milestones (like walking) at similar ages and are virtually identical in vocabulary, creativity, intelligence, and overall happiness.
- Females have more body fat but less muscle, is typically shorter/lighter, is more sensitive to sensory input (smell/sound), and has higher rates of anxiety and depression.

A. Gender and Genes

- Males enters puberty later, has a shorter lifespan, is more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD, and is more likely to die by suicide or accidental causes (like lightning).
- Men generally have more neurons, while women tend to have more neural connections.
- Research indicates that people generally hold a bias known as the **women are wonderful effect**.

B. Play

- Girls talk more intimately and play less aggressively; they also play in smaller groups, often talking with one friend.
- Boys more often do larger group activities.

C. Friendship

- Women spend more time on phone calls, texts, and social media; their talk aims for affiliation (bonding). Men, however, talk more overall when the goal is asserting opinions or providing information.
- Adult women in individualistic cultures are more likely than men to describe themselves in relational terms, welcome help, experience relationship-linked emotions, and be attuned to others' relationships.
- In conversation, men more often focus on tasks and on connections with large groups, whereas women focus on personal relationships.

C. Friendship

- Women are more aware of how their actions affect other people.
- Women share more of their lives and offer more support.
- When facing stress, men tend to respond with “fight or flight”; often, their response to a threat is combat. Women, when under stress, more turn to friends and family for support.

D. Aggression

- Men dominate in physical aggression globally. Men are far more likely to engage in hunting, fighting, and war. Statistically, men make up the vast majority of murder arrests, battlefield deaths, and death row inmates.
- Women are equal to or slightly more likely than men to engage in less physical forms of aggression, such as spreading gossip, verbal attacks, or throwing objects.
- The gender difference in physical aggression shrinks significantly when a person is provoked; however, men remain much more likely to cause actual physical injury.

E. Smiling

- Across hundreds of studies and thousands of photos (including yearbooks and media), women are consistently found to smile significantly more than men.
- There is no gender difference in smiling during early childhood. Boys and girls smile at the same rate in elementary school photos. Apparently, boys learn not to smile by age 11.

F. Family Relations

- Following their child's birth, women become more traditional in their gender-related attitudes and behaviors.
- Women buy three times as many gifts and greeting cards, write two to four times as many personal letters, and make 10 to 20 percent more long-distance calls to friends and family.
- Among 500 randomly selected Facebook pages around the world, women displayed more family photos and expressed more emotion, and men were more likely to display status or risk-taking activities.

G. Vocation

- Women are more interested in jobs dealing with people (teachers, doctors), and men in jobs with things (truck driver, engineer).
- Females are less interested in math-intensive careers than are males, even among those with a talent for math.
- Men gravitate disproportionately to jobs that enhance inequalities; women gravitate to jobs that reduce inequalities.
- Men value earnings, promotion, challenge, and power; women value good hours, personal relationships, and opportunities to help others.

H. Empathy

- Women are much more likely to describe themselves as empathetic.
- Women generally outperform men at "decoding" emotional messages.
- Because women are perceived as more nurturing and understanding, both men and women report that friendships with women are more intimate and enjoyable. Consequently, both genders typically turn to women when seeking emotional support.

I. Social Dominance

- Men tend to excel in directive, task-focused leadership, often preferred during inter-group competition or war. Women more often excel in transformational or relational leadership, focusing on team spirit and social skills.
- Men often fear being identified as feminine and are statistically more likely to take risks or act impulsively to prove their status.
- Men tend to be more overconfident; for example, male stockbrokers trade 45% more frequently than women, often leading to poorer financial returns due to higher risk and costs.
- Men are more likely to talk assertively, interrupt, and smile less. Women's styles are often more indirect, polite, and qualified.

J. Sexuality

- Men are more likely to initiate sex, fantasize more often, seek greater sexual variety, and are more responsive to visual stimuli (like pornography).
- Women generally prioritize emotional intimacy and commitment. In same-sex pairings, lesbians are twice as likely as gay men to be in committed relationships.
- Men typically offer resources in exchange for sexual engagement.

CULTURE AND GENDER

Gender role

A set of behavior expectations (norms) for males and females.

Gender Roles Vary with Culture

- In 21 of 22 countries surveyed, the majority of people believe life is more satisfying when both spouses share work and childcare responsibilities.
- Support for shared roles varies drastically by nation. For example, while Spain supports the dual-income model by a 13 to 1 margin, Pakistan opposes it by 4 to 1.
- In times of job scarcity, the "equal right to work" is viewed differently across borders. Only about 12% of people in the U.S. and Britain believe men should be prioritized for jobs, compared to 80% in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Nigeria.

Gender Roles Vary Over Time

- In 1938, only 20% of Americans approved of married women working; by 1996, that number rose to 80%.
 - Concerns regarding the negative impact of working mothers on preschoolers dropped from 59% in the 1970s to 21% by 2013.
 - The use of male pronouns in books dropped from a 4:1 ratio to 2:1 over several decades.
- Harvard Business School went from zero female graduates in 1965 to a 41% female student body in 2016.
 - Women now make up nearly half (47%) of medical and law students, up from single digits in the 1960s.

Gender Roles Vary Over Time

- While progress is evident at home, a "stalled" equality persists in domestic labor: In the 1960s, women did seven times more housework than men. Today, the gap is smaller, but women are still significantly more likely to engage in daily chores and childcare.
- Mothers are working for pay three times more than they did in 1965, yet they still log about half the paid hours that men do.
- These rapid changes suggest that gender roles are not biologically "fixed" but are highly adaptable to time and culture.

Peer-Transmitted Culture

The Nurture Assumption

- Proposed by Judith Rich Harris in 1998
- States that parental nurture, the way parents bring their children up, governs who their children become.

Limits of Parental Influence:

- Research shows that siblings raised in the same home are often as different from one another as two random strangers.
- Studies on twins and adoptees indicate that genetics account for roughly 50% of personality traits, while shared home environments account for only 0–10%. The remaining variance is attributed to other factors, primarily peer groups.
- Parents do influence specific values such as religious faith and political affiliation but they have surprisingly little impact on a child's core personality.

Power of Peer Influence

- Children are more likely to try new foods or start smoking if their peers do, regardless of parental encouragement or discouragement.
- Immigrant children almost always adopt the accent and norms of their peers rather than their parents.

How Cultures Persist and Change

- Parents influence their children primarily by choosing their environment (neighborhoods, schools, and social circles), which in turn determines their peer groups.
- Cultural change typically moves from the young upward. New ideas in fashion, language, or social roles are usually sparked by youth and young adults, ensuring that while traditions continue, they are constantly evolving.

In a nutshell...

- Cultural variations are manifested through personal autonomy, perceptions of time, adherence to social norms, and physical boundaries.
- Cultural commonalities are evidenced by universal friendship norms, consistent personality trait dimensions, shared social belief structures, global status hierarchies, and the prohibition of incest.

In a nutshell...

- While biological sex is determined by only one of 46 chromosomes, leaving the genetic blueprint nearly identical, significant gender disparities exist in domains such as social dominance, aggression, vocational preferences, and sexual behavior.
- Gender expectations are not universal; rather, they are socially constructed and vary significantly across different cultures.
- Gender roles are not fixed; they change as society moves through different generations.

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