

Gender Roles and Sexuality

- Gender: learned, socialized differences
- Sex: biological differences
- Gender role: societal expectations about appropriate behavior for women and men
- Gender-role stereotypes: overgeneralized (and often inaccurate) beliefs about what males and females are like.

Gender Role Norms

- Boys are expected to assume an instrumental role – “dominant, independent, assertive, competitive.
- Girls are expected to assume an expressive role – kind, nurturing, cooperative, sensitive to needs of others.

True Gender Differences

- Maccoby & Jacklin (1970's)
 - Females have greater verbal abilities
 - Males have greater spatial abilities
 - Males outperform females on mathematical ability
 - Males are more physically and verbally aggressive

Prenatal Gender Differences

- Conception: Sex chromosomes determine infant's sex
- 6 weeks of gestation: testosterone stimulates tissue into developing male internal organs. If not, organs will develop as female.
- 3-4 months: External genitalia are formed

Infancy

- Sex differences are minimal
- Boys tend to be more active, fussier
- Differential treatment
 - Girls are less prone to physical problems
 - Boys are engaged in more physical play
 - Girls are talked to more
 - Mothers are more likely to ignore emotional expressions of sons
 - Fathers spend more time with boys than girls
- Adults characterize same baby as strong/hardy if labeled as boy or delicate/soft if labeled as girl
- By 12 months, infants can distinguish men and women in photographs

Early Childhood

- During this time, children become aware of their gender and their behaviors begin to form around that core identity.
 - By 18 - 24 months, preference for sex-typed toys, some months before normally identifying own gender.
 - By age 3, prefer own-sex playmates and more sociable with same sex children.
 - By age 3, children typically begin to assign occupations, toys and activities to the stereotypical gender.
 - By age 5, associate personality traits with males and females.

Acquisition of Gender Stereotypes

- Classic study: Damon presented story to children (4-9 years) about a little boy wanting to play with dolls without the approval of his parents.
 - At ages 4 and 9 – children were more flexible about a boy playing with a doll.
 - At age 6 – children were much more rigid in thinking about gender

Middle Childhood

- By age 8/9 years, stereotypical knowledge is well developed.
- Gender-segregated groups
 - Boys' group – large, competitive, hierarchical (1-2 boys at top of pecking order) – organized around group outdoor activities
 - Girls' group – smaller, dependent on intense, intimate conversations
 - Universal across cultures
 - Probably related to play styles

Adolescence

- Gender intensification: conformity into one's gender role
 - Related to hormonal changes/puberty
 - More likely to make negative comments about peers who violate gender norm behaviors
- Timing of puberty affects two genders differently.
 - Girls more likely to have social problems as a result for early maturation.
 - Opposite is true for boys.

Adulthood

- Marriage and parenthood make gender roles more distinct.
 - Women do more household chores (66%)
 - Husbands take on “helper” role in childcare
 - Parental imperative: requirement that mothers and fathers adopt distinct gender norm roles in order to raise children successfully.
- Empty nest leads to gender roles becoming more similar (loss of parental imperative?)
 - Move to androgyny: possessing both masculine and feminine psychological traits (Bem)

Theories of Sex Role Development

- **Psychoanalytic**
- **Social learning theory**
- **Cognitive Developmental**
- **Biological Influences**

Psychoanalytic Theory

- Freud:** relied on the concept of identification, that occurs (in his theory) at around 4 or 5 years.
- Gender development depends on how one resolves Oedipus and Electra complexes during phallic stage.

Support for Freud's Theory

- Centered on preschool years as critical for gender development.
- Boys from father absent homes tend to be less traditionally sex typed

Social Learning Theory

Propose that children learn how to be male or female through 2 processes.



Social Learning Theory

- Differential reinforcement: encouraging sex-appropriate play and discouraging cross-sex play.
- Observational Learning - Modeling



Empirical support for social learning theory

- Parents respond more positively when their children play with sex typed
- Such differential reinforcement is particularly pronounced in boys
- Strongly gender stereotyped parents lead to earlier development of gender stereotypes in children.
- Fathers are more likely than mothers to employ differential reinforcement
- Fathers are especially uncomfortable with “girlish” behavior in their sons

Cognitive Developmental Theories

Once children understand gender, they actively teach themselves to be either male or females.

Kohlberg: Gender depends on one’s stage of cognitive development

- 1) Child acquires basic gender identity (3 years of age)
- 2) Gender stability (4 years of age): gender does not change (e.g., boys grow up to be men)
- 3) Gender constancy (5-7 years of age): superficial changes in appearance don’t alter gender

Evaluation of Cognitive Theories

- Once the child realizes that s/he is a boy/girl forever, s/he is highly motivated to behave in the way that is expected for that gender.
- Thus, one would expect systematic same sex imitation **only after** full gender constancy has developed.
- But, children show clear differential sex role behavior, long before achievement of full understanding of the gender concept.

Biosocial Theory of Gender Role Development

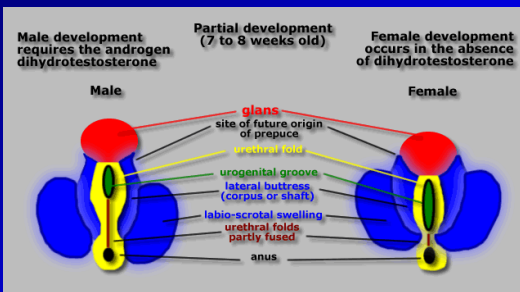
Biology has a significant impact on gender role development.

Critical Period hypothesis: 3-4 months gestational age – testosterone is critical in development of male reproductive and the inhibition of female reproductive anatomy and function.

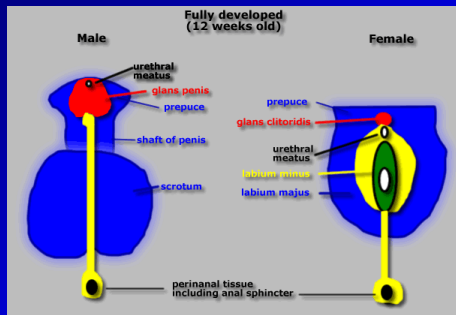
Evidence for Biosocial Theory

- Androgenized females:
 - Progestins during pregnancy → testosterone
 - Enlargement of female genitalia – resembles male genitalia

Development of Genitalia



Development of Genitalia



Development of Androgenized Females

- Females mislabeled as a boy; gender typed accordingly
- Tomboys, preferred "male-appropriate" toys
- Adolescents - date later in life
- Delayed marriages
- Preferred alternative sexual lifestyles
- Performed well on tests of spatial abilities

Evidence from Androgenized Females

- If biological abnormalities detected and corrected before 18 months, androgenized female experiences few adjustment problems
- If detected between 18 months and 3 years, adjustment problems occur because of prolonged masculine gender typing.
- Critical period of 18 months to 3 years for gender identity development?

Other Evidence for Biosocial Theory

- Males with higher levels of testosterone – more violent/aggressive
- Females prenatally exposed to testosterone – masculinized brain – behavior of males.
