**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, fussy
• 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 androgeny: 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 activities.
- 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 the 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

![Diagram of male and female genital development](image)
Development of Genitalia

[Diagram of male and female 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.