

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender

Outline

1. Psychoanalytic Theory
 - a. Freud's Theory of Psychosexual Development
 - b. Criticisms of Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory
 - c. Karen Horney
 - d. Nancy Chodorow
2. Social Learning Theory
 - a. Evidence for Social Learning Theory
 - b. Cognitive Social Learning Theory
3. Cognitive-Developmental Theory

FOCUS 2.1: Feminist Reformulation of a Theory of Moral Development
4. Gender Schema Theory
 - a. Evidence for Gender Schema Theory
5. Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology
 - a. Parental Investment and Sexual Selection
 - b. Evolutionary Psychology
- c. Feminist Critique of Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology
- d. Feminist Evolutionary Psychology and Feminist Sociobiology
- e. Gender-Neutral Evolutionary Theory
6. Social Role Theory
7. Feminist Theories
 - a. Gender as Status and Power
 - b. Intersectionality
 - c. Queer Theory
 - d. Gender Roles and Socialization
 - e. External Versus Internal Attributions of Problems
 - f. Consciousness Raising
 - g. Diversity of Feminisms
 - h. Evaluation of Feminist Theories
 - i. In Conclusion

EXPERIENCE THE RESEARCH: Gender Schema Theory
8. Chapter Summary
9. Suggestions for Further Reading

“The first thing that strikes the careless observer is that women are unlike men. They are ‘the opposite sex’—(though why ‘opposite’ I do not know; what is the ‘neighboring sex?’). But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than anything else in the world.”

Dorothy Sayers, *Unpopular Opinions* (1946)

Gender differences have long fascinated people. In the past century, science has come to dominate intellectual thought. Thus, it is not surprising that scientific understandings of gender differences have developed. In this chapter we will examine some major psychological theories that have been formulated to explain differences between women and men and how they develop.

At the outset, we think it is important to highlight the distinction between theory and empirical evidence. In the pages that follow, we will describe many of the theories about the psychology of women and gender that have been proposed. Some have solid data (empirical evidence) backing them, whereas others do not. Not every theory is true, nor is every theory a good description or explanation of behavior. We all need to be critical thinkers about the difference between statements based on theory and statements based on empirical evidence.

Psychoanalytic Theory

One of the first scholarly explanations of differences between women and men was **psychoanalytic theory**, formulated by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Psychoanalytic theory has had an enormous impact on culture: It has permeated art, film, literature, and even the language and thinking of most laypeople. For these reasons alone, it is important to understand Freudian theory as a part of our history and culture.

Psychoanalytic theory:

A psychological theory originated by Sigmund Freud; its basic assumption is that part of the human psyche is unconscious.

Freud's Theory of Psychosexual Development

One of Freud's greatest contributions was to promote the view of human personality as being the result of development in the first 5 years of life. That is, he saw the personality of an adult as the product of previous experiences, and he believed that early childhood experiences were most critical. He proposed a stage theory of psychosexual development, each stage being characterized by a focus on one of the **erogenous zones**, parts of skin or mucous membranes highly endowed with nerve endings that are very sensitive to stimulation (e.g., the lips and mouth, the anal region, genitals). During stage 1, the oral stage, the infant derives pleasure from sucking and eating and experiences the world mainly through the mouth. Following this is the anal stage, in which pleasure is focused on defecating.

Freud proposed that boys and girls pass through the first two stages of psychosexual development, the oral and the anal, in a similar manner. However, during the **phallic stage**, around the ages of 3 to 6, the development of boys and girls diverges. As one might suspect from the name for this stage, girls will be at somewhat of a disadvantage here.

During the phallic stage, the boy becomes fascinated with his own penis, which is a rich source of pleasure and interest for him. At this stage boys experience the **Oedipal complex**, named for the Greek myth of Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. In the Oedipal complex, the boy sexually desires his mother and has an intense attachment to her. He also wishes to rid himself of the father, who is a rival for the mother's affection. But the son views his father as a powerful opponent and fears that his father will retaliate by castrating him. This castration anxiety becomes so great that, in order to resolve the problem, he represses his sexual desire for his mother and makes the critical shift to *identify* with the father. In doing so, the boy *introjects* (takes into himself as his own) the values and ethics of society as represented by the father and thus develops a **superego**. And, in identifying with the father, he comes to acquire his gender identity, taking on the masculine qualities the father supposedly possesses—strength, power, and so on.

Erogenous zones:

Areas of the body that are particularly sensitive to sexual stimulation.

Phallic stage: The third stage of development in psychoanalytic theory, around 3 to 6 years of age, during which, for boys, the pleasure zone is the penis and sexual feelings arise toward the mother and, for girls, sexual feelings arise toward the father.

Oedipal complex: In psychoanalytic theory, a boy's sexual attraction to and intense love for his mother and his desire to do away with his father.

Superego: Freud's term for the part of the personality that contains the person's conscience.

For girls, the phallic stage is quite different. According to Freud, the first critical event is the girl's stark realization that she has no penis. Presumably she recognizes that the penis is superior to her clitoris. She feels cheated and envious of boys and thus comes to feel *penis envy*. Her penis envy can never be satisfied directly and, instead, is transformed into a desire to be impregnated by her father. Holding her mother responsible for her lack of a penis, she renounces her love for her mother and becomes intensely attracted to her father, thus forming her own version of the Oedipal complex, called the **Electra complex**. The desire to be impregnated by the father is a strong one and persists in the more general form of maternal urges, according to Freud.

According to Freud, the resolution of the Oedipal complex is critical for the boy's development, being necessary for the formation of his gender identity and superego. He also theorized that the Electra complex is never as fully resolved for girls as the Oedipal complex is for boys. This leads the girl to lifelong feelings of inferiority, a predisposition to jealousy, and intense maternal desires. In addition, because she never fully resolves the Electra complex and introjects society's standards, her superego is immature. She is morally inferior and lacks a sense of justice, ultimately because she lacks a penis.

Electra complex: In psychoanalytic theory, a girl's sexual attraction to and intense love for her father.

Criticisms of Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

Numerous general criticisms and feminist criticisms of Freudian theory have been made. From a scientific point of view, a major problem with psychoanalytic theory is that most of its concepts cannot be evaluated scientifically to see whether they are accurate. That is, because Freud placed so much value on unconscious desires—which cannot be directly observed, measured, or tested—it is impossible to falsify or evaluate the validity of his theory.

Another criticism that is often raised is that Freud derived his ideas almost exclusively from work with patients who sought therapy. In particular, his views on women may contain some truth about women who have problems of adjustment, but they fail to describe typical or psychologically well-adjusted women. This is an example of an error of overgeneralization.

Many modern psychologists argue that Freud overemphasized biological determinants of human behavior and underemphasized social or cultural forces in shaping behavior. In particular, his views on the origin of differences between men and women, and on the nature of female personality, are heavily biological, relying mostly on anatomical differences. In relying on anatomy as an explanation, Freud ignored the enormous forces of culture acting to create gender differences.

Feminists have raised numerous criticisms of Freudian theory, including those noted above (e.g., Lerman, 1986; J. A. Sherman, 1971; Weisstein, 1971). They are particularly critical of Freud's assumption that the clitoris and vagina are inferior to the penis and have argued that Freudian theory is **phallogocentric**.

Feminists also note the similarities between psychoanalytic theory and some of the themes discussed in Chapter 1. In this context, Freud seems simply to be articulating age-old myths and images about women in "scientific" language. The image of women as sinful and the source of evil is translated into the scientific-sounding "immature superego." Certainly Freud's phallogocentrism is a good example of a male-as-normative or androcentric model. Basically, for Freud, a girl is a castrated boy. His model of development describes male development, with female development being an inadequate variation on it.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge Freud's contributions in his recognition of the importance of development in shaping human behavior and personality.

Phallogocentric: Male centered or, specifically, penis centered.



Bettmann/Bettmann/Getty Images

PHOTO 2.1 Karen Horney made substantial contributions to psychoanalytic theory.

Womb envy: In Horney's analytic theory, the man's envy of the woman's uterus and reproductive capacity.

Karen Horney

Several of the most prominent psychoanalytic theorists were women, and not surprisingly, they made some modifications to Freud's theory. Karen Horney's (1885–1952) theoretical papers show an evolution over time in her own thinking. Originally Horney (pronounced Horn-eye) accepted Freud's ideas wholeheartedly; in a 1924 paper she eagerly documented the origins of penis envy and of the castration complex in women. However, she soon became critical of these notions, and in a 1926 paper she pointed out that Freudian theory actually articulates the childish views boys have of girls and that Freud's psychological theory of women was phallogocentric.

Her chief disagreement with Freud was over his notion that penis envy was the critical factor in female development. Horney used the master's tricks against him and postulated that the critical factor was male envy of women, particularly of female reproductive potential, which she called **womb envy**. She also suggested that male achievement represents an overcompensation for feelings of anatomical inferiority (i.e., a femininity complex).

Nancy Chodorow

Nancy Chodorow's (1978) book *The Reproduction of Mothering* is a more recent addition to the psychoanalytic literature, representing second-wave feminism (L. C. Bell, 2004). Integrating psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives, Chodorow sought to answer this question: Why do women mother? That is, why is it that in all cultures women do almost all of the child care? She theorized that, when the child care is provided primarily by women, daughters and sons develop differently. That is, mothering produces daughters who want to mother—thereby reproducing mothering—and sons who dominate and devalue women.

Infants start life in a state of total dependency, and given the traditional division of labor (in which women care for children), those dependency needs are satisfied almost exclusively by the mother. In addition, infants are egocentric, or self-centered, and have trouble distinguishing between the primary caretaker—the mother—and themselves. Because mothers do such a good job of meeting their infants' every need, infants blissfully assume that mothers have no interests outside of mothering their children. As the children grow, the unpleasant reality eventually becomes clear as they come to understand that mothers do have other interests.

In her book, Chodorow theorized that the early, intensely intimate relationship with the mother affects the sense of self and attitudes toward women, for both daughters and sons. Boys and girls continue to expect women to be caring and sacrificing, and that forever shapes their attitudes toward women. The girl's sense of self is profoundly influenced because her intense relationship to her mother is never entirely broken. Therefore, girls never see themselves as separate in the way boys do, and girls and women continue to define themselves as caregivers of others.

By contrast, boys begin with the same intense attachment to the mother, but must repress that relationship in order to develop a masculine identity. Thus masculinity comes to be defined negatively, as the opposite or lack of femininity. Masculinity involves

denying feminine maternal attachment. Therefore, the boy's need to separate himself from his mother (and all women) and define a masculine identity for himself fosters his devaluation of all women. Traditionally, fathers have been essentially absent or uninvolved in child care, thereby idealizing their masculine qualities and promoting the notion of masculine superiority. At the same time, men's capacity for providing child care is limited by their denial of relatedness.

According to Chodorow, women's relational needs are greater than men's relational needs, which are satisfied by a heterosexual relationship with a woman, in which they recapture the warmth of the infant's relationship with their mother. Yet women's greater relational needs cannot entirely be satisfied by a man. And so, women have babies, their relational needs are satisfied, and the cycle repeats itself.

Chodorow's question—Why do women mother?—is not so small as it might appear. Women's mothering perpetuates the whole division of labor by gender, because once women are committed to be the exclusive caregivers, men must do the other jobs necessary for society to continue. Moreover, women's mothering promotes the devaluation of women.

What makes Chodorow's psychoanalytic theory *feminist*? First, Chodorow offers a feminist revision of some of Freud's ideas. For example, she argues that penis envy results not from a girl's recognition of the inherent superiority of the penis (as Freud said), but rather from the fact that the penis symbolizes the power men have in our society. She argues that women's mothering was taken for granted and not given the attention it deserved (Chodorow, 2013). Second, Chodorow does not stop with her analysis of the family dynamics that perpetuate the devaluation of women; she gives a prescription for social change to eliminate inequities for women. She theorizes that the only way for the cycle to be broken is for men to begin participating equally in child care:

Any strategy for change whose goal includes liberation from the constraints of an unequal social organization of gender must take account of the need for a fundamental reorganization of parenting, so that primary parenting is shared between men and women. (Chodorow, 1978, p. 215)

Research evidence helps us evaluate some aspects of Chodorow's theory. For example, in one study researchers observed mother-child interactions in a sample of Latinx families (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2019). The team measured maternal behaviors such as sensitivity, positive regard, negative regard, detachment, and intrusiveness toward their children, as well as child behaviors such as engagement and positive and negative mood. They found that mothers behaved similarly with their sons and daughters and that boys and girls behaved similarly with their mothers. In other words, the findings don't support Chodorow's assertion that mothers and daughters are closer than mothers and sons.

Several key criticisms of Chodorow's theory should be noted (e.g., Lorber et al., 1981). First, the theory has a heterosexist and cisnormative bias. It explains in detail why children grow up heterosexual, consistent with the gender binary, assuming that all of them would, while making no attempt to understand the development of people with other sexual orientations (Rich, 1980). Second, as a feminist theory, Chodorow's theory has been criticized for lacking an intersectional approach, in that it focuses exclusively on gender and ignores race and social class (Spelman, 1988). Third, most of the evidence Chodorow cites in her book is clinical—that is, it comes from individual histories of people seeking psychotherapy. As such, Chodorow's theory is open to the same criticism that

was made of Freud's theory: The theory is based on the experiences of people who are maladjusted, and thus their experiences are not generalizable.

Social Learning Theory

Psychoanalytic approaches, with their emphasis on unconscious desires, eventually gave way to a very different set of approaches in psychology—learning theories, which instead emphasize behaviors. Social learning theory is a major theoretical system in psychology, designed to describe the processes of human development (Bandura & Walters, 1963). It emphasizes several key mechanisms in development, including reinforcement, punishment, imitation, and observational learning. Thus, an explanation for psychological gender differences is that children *learn* how to behave differently based on their gender. That is, boys and girls act appropriately for their genders because they have been rewarded for doing some things and punished for doing others. The idea is that the operant conditioning mechanisms of reinforcement and punishment explain the acquisition of gender roles. Thus, children are rewarded or reinforced for displaying gender-appropriate behaviors and punished or not rewarded for displaying gender-inappropriate behaviors. For example, little girls are rewarded for being quiet and obedient, whereas little boys are rewarded for being athletic and tough. As a result, children are more likely to repeat the behaviors that have been reinforced, and gender differences in behavior develop.

Social learning theory also emphasizes the importance of two additional mechanisms: imitation and observational learning. **Imitation**, or **modeling**, means simply that children do what they see others (termed *models*) doing. **Observational learning** refers to situations in which children learn by observing the behavior of models, even though they may not actually perform the behavior at the time, perhaps not using the information until months or years later. These three mechanisms, then—reinforcement, imitation, and observational learning—are thought to underlie the process of **gender typing**—that is, the acquisition of gender-typed behaviors and learning of gender roles—according to social learning theory.

Children's imitation is motivated partly by the power of authority figures, so they are especially likely to imitate parents, other adults, or older peers. With regard to gender typing, the theory assumes that children tend to imitate models of a similar gender more than they imitate models of a different gender. Therefore, the little girl imitates her mother and other women more than she does men. This mechanism of imitation helps to explain the acquisition of the complex and subtle aspects of gender roles that probably have not been the object of reinforcements.

Children may learn behaviors but not perform them. A behavior may become part of the child's repertoire through observational learning. Such information may be stored up for use perhaps years later, when a situation in adolescence or adulthood calls for knowledge of gender-appropriate behaviors. For example, a young girl may observe her mother caring for an infant sibling. Although the little girl may not perform any infant-care behaviors at the time, much less be rewarded for them, she nonetheless may store up the information for use when she herself is a mother. Children will also learn to anticipate the consequences of their actions. The little girl knows in

Imitation: People doing what they see others doing.

Modeling: Demonstrating gendered behavior for children; also refers to the child's imitation of the behavior.

Observational learning: Observing someone doing something and then doing it at a later time.

Gender typing: The acquisition of gender-typed behaviors and learning of gender roles.



PHOTO 2.2 Learning gendered behavior: After the birth of a new sibling, this preschooler uses a doll to imitate her mother's breastfeeding.

advance that her attempts to join Little League will be not be reinforced, and perhaps will even be met with punishments.

According to social learning theory, then, gender typing results from differential rewards and punishments, as well as from imitation of same-gender models and observational learning.

Evidence for Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory has stimulated a great deal of research aimed at documenting the existence—or nonexistence—of the mechanisms it proposes. This research makes it possible to assess the adequacy of the social learning model for the development of gender differences.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of imitation and reinforcements in shaping children's behavior, particularly gender-typed behaviors such as aggression. A classic study by the social learning theorist Albert Bandura (1965) is a good example. In the first phase of this experiment, children were randomly assigned to view one of three films. In all of the films, an adult model was performing more than one aggressive behavior, but in one film the model was rewarded; in another, punished; and in the third, left alone without consequences. The children's aggressive behavior was then observed. As the social learning approach would predict, children who had viewed the model being punished performed the least aggressive behavior. Furthermore, and consistent with the findings of many other investigators (see Chapter 3), boys performed more aggressive behavior than girls. In the second phase of the experiment, the children were offered attractive reinforcements (pretty sticker pictures and juice treats) for performing as many of the model's aggressive responses as they could remember. Gender differences all but disappeared in this phase, and girls performed nearly as many aggressive behaviors as boys.

This experiment illustrates several important points. The first phase demonstrated that children do imitate and that they do so differentially depending on the perceived consequences of the behavior. Notice that in this phase the children themselves were not actually reinforced; they simply observed the model being reinforced. The second phase illustrated how gender differences in aggressive behavior can be influenced by reinforcements. When girls were given equal reinforcement for aggression, they were nearly as aggressive as boys. Certainly, the experiment is evidence of the power of imitation and reinforcement in shaping children's behavior.

Many studies shed light on the questions of parents modeling gendered behaviors and children imitating their same-gender parent. For example, one study with Mexican-origin families in the U.S. found that early adolescent girls were more likely than their male peers to imitate their mother's behavior (Perez-Brena, Updegraff, & Umaña-Taylor, 2014). Yet, the researchers also found that boys were no more likely than girls to imitate their father's behavior. Of course, parents influence their children in different ways, and children who have both a mother and a father are shaped by the behaviors of both parents. For example, a study with African American families found that youths' gender-typed interests decreased when they spent more time with an other-gender parent (Skinner & McHale, 2018). Altogether, findings like these remind us that gender development is complex and shaped by many factors.

Of course, there is plenty of evidence of gender-stereotyped role models in the media. For example, in one study first and second graders were exposed to television commercials in which (a) all boys were playing with a gender-neutral toy (traditional condition), (b) all girls were playing with it (nontraditional condition), or (c) the commercial was not about

toys (control; Pike & Jennings, 2005). After the viewing, children were asked to sort six toys into those that were for boys, those that were for girls, or those that were for both boys and girls. Among the six toys was the toy children had seen in the commercial. Children in the traditional condition were more likely to say that the toy was for boys, whereas children in the nontraditional condition were more likely to say that it was for both boys and girls. These results demonstrate that even television commercials can shape children's gender typing. We return to the role of media in gender role development in Chapter 7.

Cognitive Social Learning Theory

Social learning theorists have also incorporated cognitive approaches into their theories, which are now called cognitive social learning theory or social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The emphasis on reinforcement, punishment, and imitation remains, and cognitive processes such as attention, self-regulation, and self-efficacy are added.

Every day, children observe thousands of behaviors in the complex environment surrounding them, yet they imitate or model only a few of them. Attention is the cognitive process that weeds out most of the behaviors that are irrelevant to the child and focuses on the few that are most relevant. Gender makes some behaviors relevant and others not. Once children can differentiate men and women, they pay more attention to same-gender than to other-gender models (Bussey & Bandura, 1992). As noted earlier, children tend to imitate same-gender models.

According to cognitive social learning theory, as children develop, regulation of their behavior shifts from externally imposed rewards and punishments to internalized standards and self-sanctions. As children learn to regulate themselves, they guide their own behavior (a process known as self-regulation), and as they learn the significance of gender, they monitor and regulate their own behavior according to internalized gender norms. The data show that children are more likely to monitor their behavior for gender-appropriateness when they are in mixed-gender groups than when they are in single-gender groups (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Self-efficacy is an important concept in social cognitive theory. **Self-efficacy** refers to our beliefs about our ability to accomplish something, to produce a particular outcome. People can have a global sense of self-efficacy, but efficacy beliefs also tend to vary depending on the area or task. You may feel certain that you can earn an A in a psychology course but have no confidence that you can pass a chemistry course. Efficacy beliefs are extremely important in individuals' lives. They affect the goals we set for ourselves, how much time and effort we put into attaining a goal, and whether we persist in the face of difficulties. People with strong efficacy beliefs redouble their efforts in the face of challenges, whereas those with a low sense of efficacy give up.

Efficacy beliefs, for example, play a large role in career choice and pursuing a career, perhaps over many years of necessary education (Bandura et al., 2001). Occupations are highly gendered (see Chapter 9). As girls observe teachers and see many women successfully doing the job, their sense of self-efficacy at being a teacher increases. By contrast, when they observe few women among airline pilots, their sense of efficacy at being a pilot declines and they don't even consider it an option.

Overall, though, cognitive social learning theory is an optimistic theory for those who want to see social change in gender roles. It says that children can and will learn a very different set of gender roles if powerful others—for example, parents and the media—change which behaviors they model and reinforce.

Self-efficacy: A person's belief in their ability to accomplish a particular task.

Cognitive-Developmental Theory

In terms of impact, perhaps the closest equivalent in the second half of the 20th century to Freud's work in the first half was the developmental theory proposed by Jean Piaget, together with his colleague Bärbel Inhelder. Lawrence Kohlberg (1966) then extended Piaget and Inhelder's cognitive principles to the realm of gender development.

Much of Piaget and Inhelder's thinking arose from their observations of the errors children made in answering questions such as those asked on intelligence tests. They concluded that these errors did not indicate that the children were stupid or ignorant, but rather that they had a different cognitive organization from that of adults. Piaget and Inhelder discovered that the cognitive organizations of children change systematically over time, and they constructed a stage theory of cognitive development to describe the progression of these changes. Interestingly, concepts of gender and gender identity undergo developmental changes parallel to the development of other concepts. Piagetian perspectives on cognitive development emphasize the importance of the child in constructing their own development, or being active and internally motivated to understand the meaning of concepts.

Kohlberg theorized that **gender constancy**—the understanding that gender is a stable and consistent part of oneself—is critical to children's gender development. Put in Piagetian terms, when a child has gender constancy, they can *conserve* gender; conservation is the understanding that, even though something may change in appearance, its essence remains the same. Achieving gender constancy is a developmental process that begins with acquiring **gender identity**, or knowing their own gender. Children typically have gender identity around 2 years of age (Kohlberg, 1966; Zosuls et al., 2009). We provide a more detailed discussion of the stages of gender constancy development in Chapter 7.

Cognitive-developmental theory views gender role learning as one aspect of cognitive development. The child learns a set of rules regarding what men do and what women do, and behaves accordingly. In this theory, gender role learning is not entirely imposed by external forces, but rather is self-motivated and reflects children's engagement with their social environment. The child essentially engages in self-socialization and self-selects the behaviors to be learned and performed on the basis of rules regarding the gender appropriateness of the behavior. In Chapter 7, we revisit gender learning in childhood and discuss the self-socialization model of gender (Tobin et al., 2010).

Gender constancy: The understanding that gender is a stable and consistent part of oneself.

Gender identity: The first stage of gender constancy development, in which children can identify and label their own gender and the gender of others.

FOCUS 2.1

FEMINIST REFORMULATION OF A THEORY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Lawrence Kohlberg made another major contribution to psychology: a theory of moral development—that is, he developed a stage theory of how our understanding of morality and moral problem solving changes from early

childhood through adolescence. First, you need to know how Kohlberg studied moral development and how he determined that there are stages in the development of moral reasoning.

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Kohlberg studied moral thought by presenting children or adults with a moral dilemma, such as this one:

In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging 10 times what the drug cost him to make. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could get together only about \$1,000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz gets desperate and considers breaking into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

Following presentation of the dilemma, the participant is asked a number of questions, such as whether Heinz should steal the drug and why. The important part is not

whether the person says Heinz should or should not steal, but rather the person's answer to the question of why—which reflects the stage of development of moral reasoning.

Based on his research, Kohlberg concluded that people go through a series of three levels in their moral reasoning as they mature (in addition, each level is divided into two stages, for a total of six stages). His model is presented in Table 2.1. In Level I, *preconventional morality*, children (usually preschoolers) have little sense of rules and obey simply to avoid punishments or to obtain rewards. For example, Heinz should not steal because he might get caught and put in jail. In Level II, *conventional morality*, children (usually beginning in elementary school) are well aware of society's rules and laws and conform to them rigidly; there is a law-and-order mentality and a desire to look good in front of others. For example, Heinz should not steal because stealing is against the law. Finally, in Level III, *postconventional morality*, a person transcends the rules and laws of society and instead behaves in accordance with an internal, self-defined set of ethical principles. For example, it is acceptable for Heinz to steal because human life is more important than property. In Level III, it might be judged acceptable to violate laws in some instances in which they are unjust.

TABLE 2.1 Kohlberg's and Gilligan's models of moral development.

| Kohlberg's Levels and Stages | Kohlberg's Definitions | Gilligan's Levels |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Level I. Preconventional morality</i> | | Concern for the self and survival |
| Stage 1. Punishment orientation | Obey rules to avoid punishment | |
| Stage 2. Naive reward orientation | Obey rules to get rewards, share to get returns | |
| <i>Level II. Conventional morality</i> | | Concern for being responsible, caring for others |
| Stage 3. Goodboy/good-girl orientation | Conform to rules that are defined by others' approval/disapproval | |
| Stage 4. Authority orientation | Rigid conformity to society's rules, law-and-order mentality, avoid censure for rule breaking | |
| <i>Level III. Postconventional morality</i> | | Concern for self and others as interdependent |
| Stage 5. Social contract orientation | More flexible understanding that we obey rules because they are necessary for social order, but the rules could be changed if there were better alternatives | |
| Stage 6. Morality of individual principles and conscience | Behavior conforms to internal principles (justice, equality) to avoid self-condemnation, and sometimes may violate society's rules | |

Kohlberg reported evidence of gender differences in moral development, and here the interest for the psychology of women and gender begins. He found that, while most men make it to Stage 4, most women get to only Stage 3. From this it might be concluded that women have a less well-developed sense of morality.

One of the most influential critiques of Kohlberg's ideas is the feminist analysis by Carol Gilligan. In her influential book *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan, 1982), she offered a reformulation of moral development from a woman's point of view. Several of Gilligan's criticisms parallel our earlier discussion of sex bias in research. Some of the moral dilemmas Kohlberg used, like the Heinz dilemma, feature a male protagonist. Girls and women may find this a bit hard to relate to. Gilligan also pointed out that the people who formed the basis for Kohlberg's theorizing were a group of 84 men whom he followed for 20 years, beginning in their childhood. When a theory is based on evidence from men, it is not surprising that it does not apply well to women; it's an error of overgeneralization. Finally, Gilligan identified a bias in Kohlberg's interpretation: The phenomenon that women reach only Stage 3 is interpreted as a deficiency in female development, whereas it might just as easily be interpreted as being a deficiency in Kohlberg's theory, which may not adequately describe female development.

Gilligan did not stop with a critique of Kohlberg's theory. She extended her analysis to provide a feminist reformulation of moral development. Her reformulation is based on the belief that women reason differently about the moral dilemmas—that is, they are speaking in a different voice—and that their voices had not been listened to. She theorized that men reason about moral issues using a **justice perspective**, which views people as differentiated and standing alone and focuses on the rights of the individual, and that women reason using a **care perspective**, which emphasizes relatedness between people and communication. According to Gilligan, men focus on contracts between people, and women focus on attachments between people. Kohlberg devised his stages of moral reasoning with the male as norm; thus women's answers appear immature, when in fact they are simply based on different concerns.

What evidence is there for Gilligan's theorizing? Gilligan herself presented several studies in support of her views. Here we will consider one of these: the abortion decision study. She interviewed 29 women between the ages of 15 and 33, all of whom were in the first trimester of pregnancy and were considering abortion. They were interviewed a second time one year later. Notice how she shifted the moral dilemma from a male stranger named Heinz to an issue that is far more central to women. Just as Kohlberg saw three major levels of moral reasoning,

so Gilligan found three levels among these women, but the focus for the levels was different. Her model appears alongside Kohlberg's in Table 2.1. In Gilligan's Level I, pre-conventional morality, the woman making the abortion decision is concerned only for herself and her survival. An example is Susan, an 18-year-old, who was asked what she thought when she found out that she was pregnant:

I really didn't think anything except that I didn't want it. . . . I didn't want it, I wasn't ready for it, and next year will be my last year and I want to go to school. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 75)

Women who have reached Level II have shifted their focus to being responsible and to caring for others, specifically for a potential child. Women in Level II see their previous, less mature Level I responses as selfish. These themes are articulated by Josie, a 17-year-old, in discussing her reaction to being pregnant:

I started feeling really good about being pregnant instead of feeling really bad, because I wasn't looking at the situation realistically. I was looking at it from my own sort of selfish needs, because I was lonely. Things weren't really going good for me, so I was looking at it that I could have a baby that I could take care of or something that was part of me, and that made me feel good. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 77)

Typical of Level II thinking, Josie sees Level I thinking as selfish and shifts her concern to being responsible for the child. Notice that deciding to have an abortion or not to have an abortion is not what differentiates Level I from Level II. Either decision can be reached at either level.

Finally, in Level III moral reasoning, the self and others are seen as interdependent, and there is a focus on balancing caring for others (the fetus, the father, parents) with caring for oneself. A woman must have reasonably high self-esteem to reach this level, for without it the "caring for self" aspect looks like a return to the selfishness of earlier levels, rather than a complex balancing of care extended to all, including herself. A recapitulation of her earlier moral reasoning and her current balancing of caring is articulated by Sarah, who is faced with a second abortion:

Well, the pros for having the baby are all the admiration that you would get from being a single woman, alone, martyr, struggling, having the adoring love of this beautiful Gerber baby. . . . Cons against having the baby: it was going to hasten what is looking to be the inevitable end of the

(Continued)

(Continued)

relationship with the man I am presently with. I was going to have to go on welfare. My parents were going to hate me for the rest of my life. I was going to lose a really good job that I have. I would lose a lot of independence. Solitude. . . . Cons against having the abortion is having to face up to the guilt. And pros for having the abortion are I would be able to handle my deteriorating relation with [the father] with a lot more capability and a lot more responsibility for myself. . . . Having to face the guilt of a second abortion seemed like not exactly—well, exactly the lesser of two evils, but also the one that would pay off for me personally in the long run because, by looking at why I am pregnant again and subsequently have decided to have a second abortion, I have to face up to some things about myself. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 92)

Sarah's reasoning reflects the cognitive and moral sophistication of Level III, which entails wrestling with complicated and sometimes conflicting perspectives.

How good is Gilligan's theory? First, it is an example of many of the qualities of feminist scholarship. She detected the androcentric bias of Kohlberg's work, reconstructed the theory after listening to what women said, and shaped a developmental model from it. Still, much of Gilligan's writing sounds as though men display one kind of moral thinking and women display a totally different kind. Yet it seems likely that there are some men who show "female" moral reasoning of the kind quoted earlier and some women who display "male" moral reasoning. Here is the

theme of the tension between gender similarities and gender differences.

What do the data say? A major meta-analysis (for an explanation of meta-analysis, see Chapter 3) of studies that had examined gender differences found that women score at the same moral level, on average, as men. That is, there is no evidence to support Gilligan's basic claim that Kohlberg's scales shortchange women and cause them to score as less morally mature. Another meta-analysis examined studies that had tested the use of the justice perspective versus the care perspective, to test Gilligan's assertion that men and women reason with different "moral voices." Averaged over all studies, the gender difference in care orientation did favor women, but was small: $d = -0.28$. (The d statistic is explained in Chapter 3.) The average gender difference in justice orientation favored men, but also was small: $d = 0.19$. In short, although women have a tendency to emphasize care reasoning and men have a tendency to emphasize justice reasoning, the differences are small, and most people use combinations of justice and care in their thinking about moral issues. It simply would not be accurate to say that girls and women speak in one moral voice and boys and men in another.

In sum, Gilligan's main contribution was to articulate a different side of moral reasoning, one based on relationships and caring. While gender differences in moral reasoning are small, it is important to recognize Gilligan's contribution in historical perspective: it offered a feminist reformulation of an androcentric theory based on gender-biased methods.

Sources: Colby et al. (1983); Gilligan (1982); Jaffee & Hyde (2000); Kohlberg (1969); Mednick (1989); L. J. Walker (1984).

Justice perspective:

According to Gilligan, an approach to moral reasoning that emphasizes fairness and the rights of the individual.

Care perspective:

According to Gilligan, an approach to moral reasoning that emphasizes relationships between people and caring for others and the self.

Schema: In cognitive psychology, a general knowledge framework that a person has about a particular topic; the schema then processes and organizes new information on that topic.

Gender Schema Theory

A feminist social-cognitive perspective on gender development is psychologist Sandra Bem's (1981) gender schema theory. *Schema* is a concept from cognitive psychology, the branch of psychology that investigates how we think, perceive, process, and remember information. A **schema** is a general knowledge framework that a person has about a particular topic. A schema organizes and guides perception, and typically helps us process and remember information. Yet schemas also act to filter and interpret information, and they can therefore cause errors.

Bem (1981) applied schema theory to understanding the gender-typing process in her gender schema theory (see also C. L. Martin & Halverson, 1983; C. L. Martin et al., 2002). Her proposal was that each one of us has as part of our knowledge structure a **gender schema**, a set of gender-linked associations. Furthermore, the gender schema represents a basic predisposition to process information on the basis of gender.

It represents our tendency to see many things as gender-related and to want to dichotomize things on the basis of gender. The gender schema processes new, incoming information, filtering and interpreting it.

Bem argued that the developmental process of gender typing or gender role acquisition in children is a result of the child's gradual learning of the content of their culture's gender schema. The gender-linked associations that form the schema are many: Girls wear dresses and boys don't; boys are strong and tough, girls are pretty (perhaps learned simply from the adjectives adults apply to children, rarely or never calling boys pretty, rarely or never calling girls tough); girls grow up to be mommies, boys don't.

In a further process, the gender schema becomes closely linked to the self-concept. Thus 5-year-old Maria knows she is a girl and also has a girl schema that she attaches to her own sense of girlhood. Maria's self-esteem then begins to be dependent on how well she measures up to her girl schema. At that point, she becomes internally motivated to conform to society's female gender role (a point much like Kohlberg's). Society does not have to force her into the role. She gladly does it herself and feels good about herself in the process. Finally, Bem postulated that different individuals have, to some extent, different gender schemas. The content of the schema varies from one person to the next, perhaps as a result of the kinds of gender information to which one is exposed in one's family throughout childhood. And the gender schema is more central to self-concept for some people than for others; gender schematic individuals are traditionally masculine men and feminine women, whereas gender aschematic individuals are less gender-typed.

Evidence for Gender Schema Theory

In one classic study, Bem (1981) gave a list of 61 words, in random order, to respondents who were college students. Some of the words were proper names, some referred to animals, some were verbs, and some were articles of clothing. Half the names were masculine and half were feminine. One-third of the animal words were masculine (gorilla), one-third were feminine (butterfly), and one-third were neutral (ant). Similarly, one-third of the verbs and the articles of clothing were each masculine, feminine, and neutral. The participants' task was to recall as many of the 61 words as they could, in any order. It is known from many previous studies that in memory tasks such as these, people tend to cluster words into categories based on similar meaning; this is indicated by the order in which they recall the words. For example, if the person organized the words according to gender, the recall order might be gorilla, bull, trousers; but if the organization was according to animals, the recall order might be gorilla, butterfly, ant. If gender-typed people (masculine men and feminine women, as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory, a test discussed in Chapter 3) do possess a gender schema that they use to organize information, then they should cluster

Gender schema: A person's general knowledge framework about gender; it processes and organizes information on the basis of gender-linked associations.

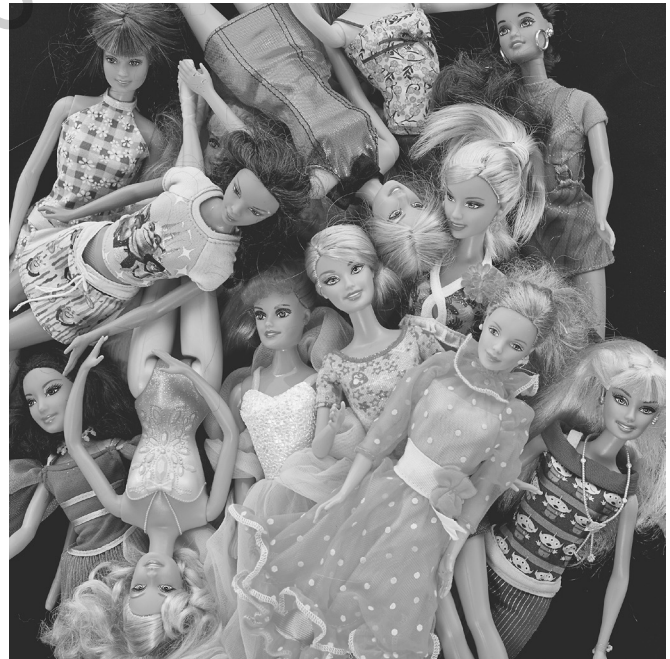
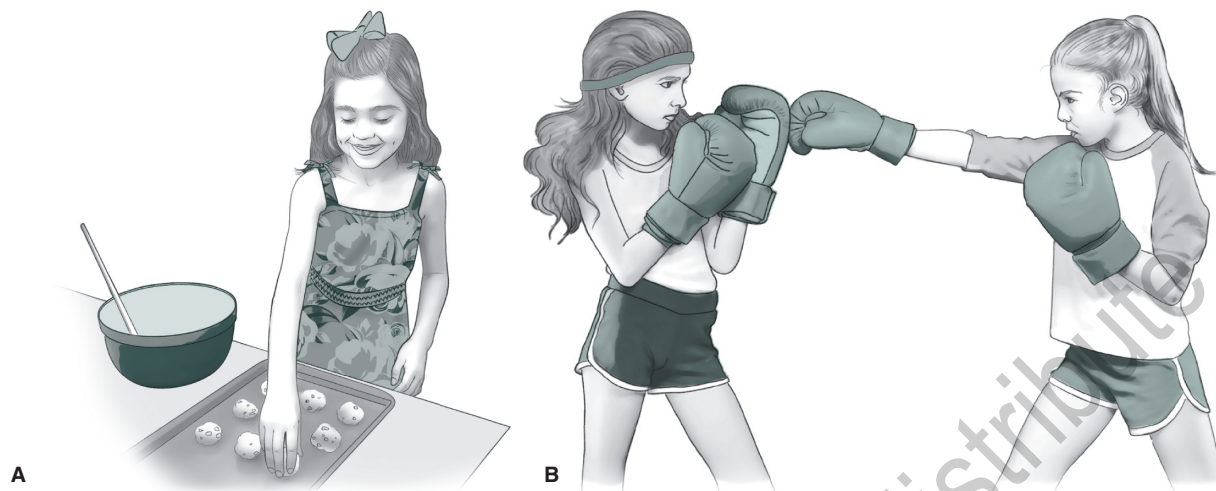


PHOTO 2.3 Gender-schematic children recognize that these toys are created for girls.

FIGURE 2.1 Gender schemas and children's memory.

Source: Adapted from C. L. Martin and Halverson (1983).

their recalled words into gender groupings. That is exactly what occurred. Gender-typed persons tended to cluster words according to gender, a result that supports gender schema theory.

In another experiment, 5- and 6-year-old children were shown pictures of boys and girls performing stereotype-consistent activities, such as girls baking, and stereotype-inconsistent activities, such as girls boxing (see Figure 2.1; C. L. Martin & Halverson, 1983). One week later the children were tested for their recall of the pictures. The results indicated that the children distorted information by changing the gender of the people in the stereotype-inconsistent pictures, while not making such changes for the stereotype-consistent pictures. That is, children tended to remember a picture of a girl sawing wood as having been a picture of a boy sawing wood. That result is just what would be predicted by gender schema theory: Incoming information that is inconsistent with the gender schema is filtered out and reinterpreted to be consistent with the gender schema. This study also indicates that the gender schema is present even in 5-year-olds.

Gender schema theory continues to guide empirical research on gender development. For example, researchers have explored how gendered toy marketing—such as signaling that toys are “for girls” by making them pink in color and thus consistent with gender schemas—may restrict the interests and development of children (e.g., Fine & Rush, 2016; Weisgram & Dinella, 2018). Bem’s formulation of gender schema theory also has had an impact beyond the field of psychology (Starr & Zurbriggen, 2017.)

Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology

Next we turn to two theories that argue that human gender differences are rooted in evolution. Sociobiology is a controversial theory initially proposed by Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson (1975b) in his book *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, a massive, 700-page work filled with countless examples from insect life.

Sociobiology can be defined as the application of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by **natural selection** to understand the social behavior of animals, including humans. That is, sociobiologists are specifically concerned with understanding how social behaviors—such as aggression or caring for the young—are the product of natural selection.

To understand what sociobiology has to say about women and gender roles, we must first discuss Darwin's theory. His basic observation was that living things over-reproduce—that is, they produce far more offspring than would be needed simply to replace themselves. Yet population sizes remain relatively constant because many individuals do not survive. There must be differential survival, with the “fittest” organisms surviving and reproducing viable offspring. **Evolutionary fitness** is defined in this theory as the relative number of genes an animal contributes to the next generation. The bottom line is producing lots of offspring—specifically, healthy and viable offspring. Thus, a man who jogs 10 miles a day, lifts weights, and has a 50-inch chest but whose sperm count is zero would be considered to have zero fitness according to sociobiologists. Over generations, there is differential reproduction, the fittest individuals producing the most offspring. Genes that produce fitness characteristics become more frequent, and fitness characteristics (“adaptive” characteristics) become more frequent; genes and associated characteristics that produce poor fitness become less frequent.

The basic idea of sociobiology is that the evolutionary theory of natural selection can be applied to social behaviors. That is, a particular form of social behavior—say, caring for one's young—would be adaptive, in the sense of increasing one's reproductive fitness. Other social behaviors—for example, female infanticide—would be maladaptive, decreasing one's reproductive fitness. Over the many generations of natural selection that have occurred, the maladaptive behaviors should have been weeded out, and we should be left with social behaviors that are adaptive because they are the product of evolutionary selection.

With this as background for the general principles of sociobiology, let us now consider some specific arguments of sociobiologists that are of special relevance to women.

Parental Investment and Sexual Selection

Sociobiologists interested in gender development and differences have focused a great deal on the concepts of parental investment and sexual selection. For example, sociobiologists offer a very different explanation than Chodorow does for why it is typically the female of the species who does most of the care of offspring. The sociobiologist's explanation rests on the concept of **parental investment**, which refers to behaviors or other investments of the parent with respect to the offspring that increase the offspring's chance of survival but that also cost the parent something (Trivers, 1972). Females of a species generally have a much larger parental investment in their offspring than males do. At the moment of conception, the female has the greater parental investment—she has just contributed one of her precious eggs. The male has contributed merely a sperm. Eggs are precious because they are large cells and, at least in humans, only one egg is released each month. Sperm are “cheap” because they are small cells and are produced in enormous numbers. For example, there are 200 million sperm in the average human male ejaculate, and a man can produce that number again in 48 hours (Malm et al., 2004). So at the moment of conception the female has invested much with her highly valuable egg, but the male has invested little with a single sperm. In mammals, the female then proceeds to gestate the young (for a period of 9 months in humans). Here again she

Sociobiology: The application of evolutionary theory to explain the social behavior of animals, including people.

Natural selection:

According to Darwin, the process by which the fittest animals survive, reproduce, and pass on their genes to the next generation, whereas animals that are less fit do not reproduce and therefore do not pass on their genes.

Evolutionary fitness:

In evolutionary theory, an animal's relative contribution of genes to the next generation.

Parental investment: In sociobiology, behaviors or other investments in the offspring by the parent that increase the offspring's chance of survival.

makes an enormous investment of her body's resources, which otherwise could have been invested in doing something else. Then the offspring are born and, in the case of mammals, the female nurses them, once again investing time and energy.

It is most adaptive for whichever parent has the greater parental investment to continue caring for the offspring. For the female, who has invested her precious egg, gestation, and nursing, it would be evolutionary insanity to abandon the offspring when they still need more care in order to survive. By contrast, the male has invested relatively little and his best reproductive strategy is to impregnate as many females as possible, producing more offspring carrying his genes. This strategy is particularly effective if he can count on the female to take care of the offspring so that they survive.

If we apply this logic to humans, women are the ones doing the child care for two key reasons. The first reason is that the woman has a greater parental investment, and therefore it is adaptive for her to continue caring for her children. The second reason arises from a basic fact: Maternity is always certain, whereas paternity is not. In other words, the woman is sure when a child is hers. The sociobiologist would say that she knows that the child carries her genes. The man cannot be sure that the child is his, carrying his genes. It is thus adaptive for the woman—that is, it increases her fitness—to care for the child to make sure that they, and her genes, survive. It does not increase the man's fitness to care for children that may not carry his genes. Therefore, women do the child care.

Sociobiologists have attempted to explain why female orgasm evolved in humans, given that it exists in few, if any, other species. They argue that human female orgasm has evolved because human babies are born particularly helpless, dependent, and in need of parental care (Barash, 1982). Essentially, human babies are more likely to survive if they have two parents. A monogamous mating system, with permanent pairing of mother and father, would be adaptive and favored in evolution. The female orgasm (and the female human's continuous interest in sex at all phases of the menstrual cycle) thus evolved to hold together that permanent pair.

Sociobiologists have also extended their theorizing about parental investment to explain the sexual **double standard**—that is, that a man is allowed, even encouraged, to be promiscuous, whereas a woman is punished for engaging in promiscuous sex and instead is very careful and selective about whom she has sex with (Barash, 1982). The explanation has to do with that precious egg and those cheap sperm. It is adaptive for her to be careful of what happens to the egg, whereas it is adaptive for him to distribute sperm to as many women as possible. Anticipating her greater parental investment, the woman must also be careful about whose genes she mixes with her own. In essence, she chooses quality and he chooses quantity.

Sociobiologists have theorized that another evolutionary mechanism involved in the development of gender differences is sexual selection. **Sexual selection** is an evolutionary mechanism originally proposed by Darwin to act in parallel to natural selection and to produce differences between males and females of a species. Essentially, sexual selection means that different selection pressures act on males and females, and thus males and females become different. Sexual selection consists of two processes: (1) Members of one gender (usually males) compete among themselves to gain mating privileges with members of the other gender (usually females), and (2) members of the other gender (usually females) have preferences for certain members of the first gender (usually males) and decide which of them they are willing to mate with. In short, males fight and females choose. Process (1) neatly explains why the males of most species are larger and more aggressive than the females—aggression is adaptive for males in competition, and they are the product of sexual selection. Sexual selection explains, for example, why

Double standard:

The evaluation of male behavior and female behavior according to different standards, including tolerance of male promiscuity and disapproval of female promiscuity; used specifically to refer to holding more conservative, restrictive attitudes toward female sexuality.

Sexual selection:

According to Darwin, the processes by which members of one gender (usually males) compete with each other for mating privileges with members of another gender (usually females), who, in turn, choose to mate only with certain preferred members of the first gender (males).

among many species of birds it is the male that has the gorgeous plumage while the female is drab. Plumage is a way that males compete among themselves, and females are attracted to the most gorgeous males. Females, on the other hand, in their roles as choosers, need not be gorgeous and have not been selected to be so. Perhaps they have been selected for wisdom?

Sexual selection, then, is a mechanism that is used to explain differences between males and females of a species. It is particularly designed to explain the greater size, strength, and aggressiveness of males. Many more examples exist, but the thrust of the argument is clear: Sociobiologists argue that the social behaviors we see in animals and humans today evolved because these behaviors were adaptive, and they continue to be biologically programmed.

Evolutionary Psychology

Evolutionary psychology is an updated and more elaborate version of sociobiology proposed by psychologist David Buss and others (Buss, 1995; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Geary, 2010; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). The basic idea is that humans' complex psychological mechanisms are the result of evolution based on natural selection. These evolved psychological mechanisms exist because, over thousands of years, they solved problems of survival or reproduction. For example, according to evolutionary psychology, fear of snakes is common precisely because it helped people avoid being bitten and poisoned by snakes.

Buss proposed *sexual strategies theory* as a way of articulating the evolved psychological mechanisms that are related to sexuality and, according to the theory, explain certain psychological gender differences (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). This theory distinguishes between short-term mating strategies (e.g., hooking up) and long-term mating strategies (e.g., marriage), and it proposes that women and men had different problems to solve in short-term as well as long-term mating. Because it is to men's evolutionary advantage to inseminate as many women as possible, men put more of their energy into short-term mating. Women, having the greater parental investment, are more interested in ensuring that their offspring survive and therefore put more of their energy into long-term mating strategies that will ensure the long-term commitment of a man who will provide resources for them and their children. Men's evolutionary problems centered on identifying fertile women and removing the uncertainty of paternity. Women, in contrast, had to identify men willing to make a long-term commitment who were also willing and able to provide resources. Thus men have evolved psychological mechanisms that lead them to prefer as sexual partners women who are in their 20s—even if the men are in their 60s—because women are at their peak fertility in their 20s. Women have evolved psychological mechanisms that lead them to prefer long-term mates who possess resources such as wealth, or qualities such as ambition or a law degree, that should indicate good capacity to provide resources in the future. Buss (1989) provided data supporting his theory from a study in which he collected data on mate preferences in 37 distinct cultures around the world and found results generally consistent with his predictions.

According to this perspective, men are also notoriously jealous about their mates' sexual infidelity because of the problem of paternity certainty. In short, if a man is going to provide resources to a female mate and her baby, he wants to be certain that the baby is his. By contrast, a woman will be more jealous if her male mate develops an emotional connection to another woman (termed emotional infidelity) because it represents a threat to the resources she needs for herself and her baby. Evolutionary psychology argues, then, that there are gender differences in responses to sexual versus emotional

Evolutionary psychology: A theory that humans' complex psychological mechanisms are the result of evolutionary selection.

infidelity (Buss et al., 1992). However, the data don't support this argument: A meta-analysis of 54 studies on this topic found that both men and women report that sexual infidelity is more distressing than emotional infidelity (Carpenter, 2012).

Feminist Critique of Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology

Feminists have long been skeptical of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology (for feminist critiques, see J. Bianchi & Strang, 2013; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Fausto-Sterling, 1993; Janson-Smith, 1980; Weisstein, 1982), and some evolutionary psychologists have been dismissive of feminist approaches (e.g., A. Campbell, 2013). Many feminists are wary of biological explanations of anything, in large part because biology always seems to end up being a convenient justification for perpetuating the status quo.

For example, the sociobiologist's belief is that the greater aggression and dominance of men are a result of sexual selection and are controlled by genes. Therefore, men are genetically dominant and women are genetically subordinate, and the subordinate status of women will have to continue because it is genetic. That kind of logic is a red flag to a feminist, who believes the status quo can be changed. Sociobiologists do not ignore environmental influences completely, so this nature-nurture controversy has to do with relative emphasis, in that sociobiologists emphasize biology and feminists emphasize environment. Consider this passage from an article written by E. O. Wilson (1975a):

In hunter-gatherer societies, men hunt and women stay at home. This strong bias persists in most agricultural and industrial societies and, on that ground alone, appears to have a genetic origin. No solid evidence exists as to when the division of labor appeared in man's ancestors or how resistant to change it might be during the continuing revolution for women's rights. My own guess is that the genetic bias is intense enough to cause a substantial division of labor even in the most free and most egalitarian of future societies. . . . Thus, even with identical education and equal access to all professions, men are likely to continue to play a disproportionate role in political life, business and science. (pp. 48–50)

If Wilson's claim were true, then we would not have witnessed the tremendous social changes that have occurred in the past century. As we will discuss in Chapters 8 and 9, women's achievements in some (though certainly not all) areas of education and work (including political life, business, and science) have matched or surpassed men's. In other words, sexual selection doesn't doom humanity to an eternity of gender inequity. Clearly, human behavior and culture are very complex.

Feminist scientists have pointed out the sexist bias in sociobiology and evolutionary psychology to ignore or minimize the significance of the active role of women in evolution (Gowaty, 1997; Hager, 1997; Sokol-Chang et al., 2013; Vandermassen, 2005). They argue that Darwin's portrayal of females as passive was inaccurate and androcentric (Hrды, 2013). For example, evolutionary psychology has paid relatively little attention to mothering (a behavior which is pretty important for evolutionary fitness!) and women's role in the ancestral diet. By contrast, a considerable amount of attention has been given to rape as an adaptive reproductive strategy that evolved through natural selection (e.g., Thornhill & Palmer, 2000). Criticisms have also been raised about the representation of women among evolutionary psychologists (Meredith, 2013).

As another instance of androcentric bias, consider the case of a famous young female macaque (monkey) named Imo, living with her troop on an island off Japan. Scientists

provisioned the troop there with sweet potatoes. Imo discovered that washing sweet potatoes got the sand off. Her discovery quickly spread among the other juniors in the troop, who then taught their mothers, who in turn taught their infants. Adult males never learned it. Next, scientists flung grains of wheat in the sand to see what the troop would do. Rather than laboriously picking the wheat out of the sand grain by grain, Imo discovered how to separate the wheat from the sand in one operation. Again, this spread from Imo's peers to mothers and infants, and, again, adult males never learned it. The fact that these Japanese macaques had a rudimentary culture has been widely heralded (Weisstein, 1982, p. 46).

Had the genders been reversed, with Imo being a male and the females being unable to learn, one can imagine the attention these facts would have been given by sociobiologists. They would have made much of the genius of the male and the lack of intelligence of females. As it is, Imo's gender is not discussed, and the learning failure of the males is similarly ignored. Sociobiologists, then, seem to ignore or minimize many animal examples that contradict human stereotypes.

Sociobiologists also rely heavily on data from nonindustrial societies, specifically hunter-gatherer societies that are supposed to be like those that existed at the dawn of the human species, millions of years ago. Once again, the emphasis is androcentrically selective; it also tends to support a colonialist bias on development. Sociobiologists emphasize "man the hunter" and how he evolved to be aggressive and have great physical prowess. Meanwhile, "woman the gatherer" is ignored, although she may have formed the foundation for early human social organization (Janson-Smith, 1980). Others have criticized sociobiology for resting on an outmoded version of evolutionary theory that modern biologists consider naive (Gould, 1987).

Many studies contradicting evolutionary psychology have emerged. As one example, evolutionary psychologist Devendra Singh (1993) presented evidence that women with a waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) of 0.70 are judged as most attractive by men, compared with women with greater WHRs. According to sexual strategies theory, men are constantly nonconsciously assessing the potential fertility of female partners and finding the most fertile ones to be the most attractive. WHR is an index of body fat distribution, and Singh argued that WHR is correlated with youth, sex hormone levels, and health. He found that Miss America contest winners and Playboy centerfolds have WHRs averaging 0.70 and vary little from that mark. This study has been much publicized, and the magical 0.70 ratio is well known, taking on the status of an academic urban legend. An independent team of investigators, however, reanalyzed the Playboy and the Miss America data and obtained three results that contradict Singh's claims (Freese & Meland, 2002). First, they found that there was actually considerable variation in the WHRs of Miss America winners, ranging from 0.61 (1963 winner) to 0.78 (1921). Second, the mean WHR for Miss America winners was 0.68, not the magical 0.70. Third, there was a systematic trend over time in the WHRs of the pageant winners and centerfolds, with the preferred WHR decreasing from the early to mid-20th century and then increasing after that. Claims that the preferred WHR is remarkably constant, supporting the contention that the preference was "hardwired" by evolution thousands of years ago, clearly are not accurate.

A second independent team noted that the other cultures in which evidence has been found for men's preference for a 0.70 WHR have all been exposed, often substantially, to Western media, and specifically to American beauty icons, thereby contaminating the results (Yu & Shepard, 1998). They studied the indigenous Matsigenka of Peru, who are isolated and thus have not been exposed to Western media. Men from that culture

ranked as most attractive a female figure with a 0.90 WHR, in contradiction to the claims of evolutionary psychologists. Clearly, cultures may vary in their beauty standards or ideals. The more general point is that purported cross-cultural tests of evolutionary psychology are not truly cross-cultural because of globalization and the far reach of American media.

Space limitations don't permit us to catalog all of the studies that provide evidence contradicting some of the claims of evolutionary psychology. Suffice it to say that there are many more (e.g., Dantzker & Eisenman, 2003; Eastwick et al., 2014; Grice & Seely, 2000; C. R. Harris, 2002; W. C. Pedersen et al., 2002; Zentner & Eagly, 2015).

You may be noticing that, with all this focus on sexual selection and heterosexual mating preferences, evolutionary psychology seems deeply rooted in **heteronormativity** and the gender binary. That is, theories such as sexual strategies theory appear to assume that all people are innately heterosexual and either male or female. Such theories can thus contribute to the marginalization of individuals outside the gender binary. Sociobiology and evolutionary psychology have long struggled to explain the diversity of sexual orientations among humans (e.g., Confer et al., 2010). More recently, social psychologist Charlotte Tate, a lesbian and openly transgender woman, proposed an intersectional feminist approach to evolutionary psychology that avoids the assumptions of heteronormativity and the gender binary (e.g., Tate, 2013; Tate & Ledbetter, 2010).

The feminist criticisms, then, are that the evolutionary psychology theories of gender can justify or rationalize and perpetuate the subordination of women; that their evidence rests on a selective, androcentric citing of the data, ignoring many contradictions; that they rely on an androcentric and oversimplified view of evolution; and that they marginalize people outside the gender binary. In addition to these criticisms, evolutionary psychology has been criticized on the grounds that it is not an empirically *falsifiable* theory (e.g., Panksepp & Panksepp, 2000); that is, it is difficult (if not impossible) to imagine a pattern of results that would contradict or refute evolutionary psychology.

Feminist Evolutionary Psychology and Feminist Sociobiology

Many of these criticisms of evolutionary psychology have been raised by feminist evolutionary psychologists. Impossible, you say? Remember that feminists are focused on gender equity and equality, regardless of their field of study. This means there are feminist approaches throughout the sciences, including feminist evolutionary psychology, feminist sociobiology, and feminist biology (we'll return to feminist biology in Chapter 10).

Frustrated with the inattention to the active role of women in shaping human evolution, feminist evolutionary psychologists have responded with efforts to make their field higher quality and more equitable. In addition to providing these insightful critiques, they have conducted high-quality feminist research in sociobiology and evolutionary psychology. They have also formed the Feminist Evolutionary Psychology Society and contributed to a hefty volume on women's role in human evolution titled *Evolution's Empress: Darwinian Perspectives on the Nature of Women* (Fisher et al., 2013).

Feminist evolutionary psychologists argue that there are three core components of a feminist approach within evolutionary psychology. A direct response to the feminist criticisms discussed earlier, these components are (1) thinking critically about sex and gender, (2) explicitly recognizing women as active agents in evolutionary processes, and (3) explicitly recognizing women as active agents in human dynamics, including those related to sexual selection and competition for mates (Kruger et al., 2013).

Heteronormativity: The belief that heterosexuality is the norm.

An example of feminist sociobiology is the work of primatologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (1999, 2009), who has written several excellent books describing the crucial and complicated role of mothering (by mothers as well as aunts, grandmothers, sisters, and so on) in evolution. In *Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species*, Hrdy (1999) assembled the evidence regarding evolutionary forces on mothering behaviors in humans and other species, while at the same time taking a decidedly feminist approach. Moreover, she has the biological sophistication and complex knowledge of primate behavior that many sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists lack.

Hrdy's basic argument is that women have evolved to care for their children and ensure their survival, but in reality these evolved tendencies are miles away from romanticized Victorian notions of all-loving, self-sacrificing motherhood. Hrdy notes, for example, that female primates of all species combine work and family—that is, they must be ambitious, successful foragers or their babies will starve. Males are not the only ones who have status hierarchies; a female chimpanzee's status within her group has a powerful influence on whether her offspring survive and what the status of those offspring will be when they reach adulthood. In contrast to other sociobiologists' views of females as being highly selective about whom they mate with, Hrdy notes that female primates of many species will mate promiscuously with males invading their troop, even if they are already pregnant. Essentially, the females seem to be trying to create some confusion about paternity, because males happily commit infanticide against infants that are not theirs but generally work to protect infants they have sired. Under these circumstances the best thing a pregnant female can do for her unborn infant is to have sex with strangers! Hrdy's arguments subvert many ideas about traditional gender roles in humans and whether these roles have an evolutionary basis.



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PHOTO 2.4 Feminist sociobiologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy studies maternal behaviors among primates, such as these langurs.

Gender-Neutral Evolutionary Theory

Not all evolutionary theorists propose that gender differences are the result of natural selection processes. For example, evolutionary biologist Patricia Gowaty has proposed a gender-neutral evolutionary theory that offers an alternative to sociobiology and evolutionary psychology (Gowaty, 2018; Gowaty & Hubbell, 2009). Gowaty is critical of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology's argument that biology is destiny—that evolution over millions of years has determined our behavior and, in particular, has determined gender differences in behavior.

Gowaty notes that the environments in which humans—and other species—find themselves vary enormously, both across geographical spaces and across an individual's lifetime. It is therefore not at all adaptive for humans to display fixed behaviors determined by evolution. Neither should there be fixed gender differences in behavior. Instead, it is most adaptive for individuals to be flexible in their behaviors, and that is exactly what evolution has selected for: flexibility and adaptability. An individual may behave in ways that are more male-typical in some situations and more female-typical in

others because different behaviors are adaptive in those different situations. Likewise, a fixed mating strategy for females (or males) would not be adaptive across numerous environments. Instead, a flexible mating strategy would be most successful.

The evidence for this theory, at least so far, is based on mathematical modeling and proofs that show that individuals who can and do change their mating behaviors in adaptive ways depending on the environment have the best reproductive fitness (are the most likely to mate successfully). Beyond that, the theory is too new to be able to evaluate it thoroughly. Notice, though, that it is a theory that can accommodate transgender and nonbinary individuals because the theory does not insist on fixed male behaviors and female behaviors.

Social Role Theory

Social psychologists Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood (1999) provided a probing critique of Buss's sexual strategies theory from evolutionary psychology and its explanations for psychological gender differences. They also articulated an alternative, social-structural explanation for Buss's findings that explains gender differences as resulting from women's and men's different positions in the social structure.

Eagly and Wood's alternative explanation, **social role theory** (also called *social structural theory*), emphasizes not cross-cultural universals, but rather the variability across cultures in patterns of gender differences. According to this view, a society's division of labor by gender (that is, gender roles) drives all other gender differences in behavior. Psychological gender differences result from individuals' accommodations or adaptations to the particular restrictions on or opportunities for their gender in their society. Social role theorists acknowledge biological differences between male and female bodies, such as differences in size and strength and the female body's capacity to bear and nurse children, but emphasize that these physical differences are important mainly because they are amplified by cultural beliefs. Men's greater size and strength have led them to pursue activities such as warfare that in turn gave them greater status, wealth, and power than women. Once men were in these roles of greater status and power, their behavior became more dominant and, similarly, women's behavior accommodated and became more subordinate. The gendered division of labor, in which women were responsible for home and family, led women to acquire such role-related skills as cooking and caring for children. In this way, women acquired nurturing behaviors and a facility for relationships. Men, specializing in paid employment in male-dominated occupations, adapted with assertive and independent behaviors.

Eagly and Wood (1999) reanalyzed Buss's 37-cultures data to test the predictions of social role theory. Their basic hypothesis was that the greater the gender differences in status in a culture, the greater would be the psychological gender differences; societies characterized by gender equality would show far less psychological gender differentiation. Recall from Chapter 1 that the United Nations maintains a database that indexes gender inequality in countries around the world (described in Focus 1.1). Correlations were high between societies' gender inequality and the magnitude of the difference between women and men in a given society on psychological measures of mate preferences. In other words, in countries where opportunities for men and women were more equal, men and women were more similar. If mate preferences were determined by evolution thousands of years ago, they should not vary across cultures and they definitely should not correlate with a society's gender equality. These findings provide powerful evidence in support of social role theory.

Social role theory:

A theory of the origin of psychological gender differences that focuses on the social structure, particularly the division of labor between men and women; also called *social structural theory*.

Feminist Theories

Many people view the feminist movement as a political group with a particular set of goals, a lobbying group trying to serve its own ends, as the National Rifle Association does. What is less recognized is that feminism has a rich, articulated theoretical basis drawing from diverse academic disciplines. Feminist theories can be applied to any psychological approach or topic.

Feminist theories were created by no single person. Instead, numerous writers have contributed their ideas, consistent with the desire of feminists to avoid power hierarchies and not to have a single person become the sole authority. But it also means that the feminist perspective as we have crystallized it here has been drawn from many sources. For that reason, we have titled this section “Feminist Theories” rather than “Feminist Theory.” Some of the central concepts and themes of feminist theories follow.

Gender as Status and Power

Feminists view gender as similar to a class variable in our society. Just as social class confers status and power, so does gender. Men and women are of unequal status, women having the lower status (Ridgeway & Bourg, 2004).

A closely related concept is the inequality of power between men and women, with men having greater power (Brace & Davidson, 2000; Pratto & Walker, 2004). Male dominance is therefore tied to female subordination. The areas of male power and dominance are diverse and occur at many levels, from institutions to marital interactions. Most political leaders are men, and men therefore have the power to pass laws that have a profound effect on women’s lives. Feminist analysis has extended this logic to many other areas, for example, to viewing rape not as a sexual act but as an expression of men’s power over women (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975). The concept of gender as an axis of power is at the heart of feminist analysis (Enns, 2004; Moradi, 2019).

From the observation of the lesser status and power of women comes another basic feminist theme: Sexism is pervasive, both in our everyday interactions and in our institutions. Women are discriminated against in diverse ways, from the underrepresentation of women in Congress to the male-centeredness of psychological theories, from the different pay scales for women and men to the gendered division of household labor. Thus, sexism pervades our lives in innumerable, profound ways, perpetuating men’s power over women.

One saying of the feminist movement has been “the personal is political” (MacKinnon, 1982). Once again, “political” refers to expressions of power. Feminists have reconceptualized many acts that were traditionally viewed as personal, as simple interactions between individuals, into acts that are seen as political, or expressions of power. As examples, Mr. Executive gropes his female assistant, or Josh rapes Meghan. Traditionally, these were thought of as personal, individual acts. They were understood to be the product of an obnoxious individual such as Mr. Executive, or of a rare, disturbed individual such as Josh, or of the inappropriately seductive behavior of the female assistant or Meghan. The feminist recasts these not as personal acts but as political expressions of men’s power over women. The greater status of men gives them a sense of entitlement to engage in such acts. At the same time, men exert power and control over women when they engage in these acts.

Theorists believe that there are four basic sources of power when one person or group has power over another (Pratto & Walker, 2004): (1) the threat of violence or the potential to harm, (2) economic power or control of resources, (3) the ability of the powerful group

to promote ideologies that tell others what they should desire (e.g., expensive cosmetics to make yourself look beautiful) or disdain (e.g., fat or even slightly overweight women), and (4) relational power; in which one person in a relationship needs the other more than the reverse. These sources of power can operate between any two unequal groups, such as Whites and African Americans in the United States, and you can see how directly they apply to relations between men and women. We will return to each of these sources of power in later chapters; for example, Chapter 14 is about violence against women by men.

Intersectionality

Feminists argue that attention to gender alone is not enough. Recall from Chapter 1 that intersectionality considers the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage simultaneously. Intersectionality is a concept that emerged and evolved largely within Black feminism and critical race theory (Collins, 2019; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; May, 2015). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), a legal scholar, first coined the term *intersectionality* and described how analyzing only gender or only race would exclude or ignore the unique experiences of women of color. Black feminists in the 1980s and 1990s described how they were marginalized by both the civil rights movement (which put Black men at the helm) and the second wave of the feminist movement (which focused on White women). Black women, they maintained, experienced “interlocking” systems of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1977) in which racism and sexism (among other systems of oppression) worked hand in hand to marginalize and oppress them. While intersectionality was first used to talk about women of color, it is an important feminist approach throughout the psychology of women and gender (Rutherford & Davidson, 2019).



Monica Schipper / Stringer/Getty Images

PHOTO 2.5 Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term *intersectionality*.

Because intersectionality is a critical theory and not a scientific theory that should be held to the standard of falsifiability, it is best to evaluate intersectional research according to how well it adheres to the essential elements of intersectionality (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). The first element is that intersectional research focuses on the experience and meaning of simultaneously belonging to multiple intertwined social categories, such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. For example, how are cisgender women’s experiences of gender identity similar to and different from transgender women’s experiences? Such a question explores a dimension of diversity within the population of women.

The second element is that researchers must examine how power is connected to belonging in each of those intersecting categories. For example, what role does social inequality play in the different experiences of gender identity among cisgender and transgender women? Both groups are oppressed *as women*, but cisgender women have privilege relative to transgender women. An important point of intersectionality is that one intersecting category may confer disadvantage while another may grant privilege.

The third element of intersectional research is that social categories are examined as properties of a person as well as their social context, so those categories and their

The third element of intersectional research is that social categories are examined as properties of a person as well as their social context, so those categories and their

significance may change. For example, how does a transgender woman's gender identity develop within a particular culture and historical period? Are there times or situations when the importance or salience of her being transgender is heightened, such as when serving in the military?

The new questions and perspectives that intersectionality inspires are limitless. The point is that social categories like gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation (among others) are highly complex, and social justice and equality are always the goals of intersectional approaches.

Queer Theory

The word *queer* has a, well, queer history. Today, many use the word as an umbrella term for anyone who is not heterosexual. Long used to mean “strange” or “odd,” queer became a heterosexual slur in the early 20th century. By the 1990s, however, the word had been reclaimed by feminist theorists within lesbian and gay studies, such as Michel Foucault (1978), Eve Sedgwick (1990), and Teresa de Lauretis (1991), who questioned the social construction of gender and sexuality as binary and fixed (Halperin, 2003). **Queer theory** proposes that one's gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation are not stable, fixed, biologically based characteristics, but rather fluid and dynamic aspects of individuals shaped by culture. Queer theory challenges binaries, especially the sexual orientation binary; thus, being queer isn't about being gay or lesbian, but rather about rejecting rigid categories or preconceived norms about one's sexual desire. Similarly, queer theory critiques the gender binary, challenging the notion that people are either female or male and that these categories are fixed and biologically determined. In addition, drawing on the meaning of “queer” as odd, peculiar, or deviating from the norm, queer theory challenges concepts like heteronormativity and other ideas about what is “normal” versus peculiar. Queer theorist Judith Butler explained,

My understanding of queer is a term that desires that you don't have to present an identity card before entering a meeting. Heterosexuals can join the queer movement. Bisexuals can join the queer movement. Queer is not being lesbian. Queer is not being gay. It is an argument against lesbian specificity: that if I am a lesbian I have to desire in a certain way. Or if I am gay I have to desire in a certain way. Queer is an argument against certain normativity, what a proper lesbian or gay identity is. (quoted in Michalik, 2001, para. 5)

Queer theory has made important contributions to the psychology of women and gender, particularly with regard to questioning the stability of gender and sexuality (B. B. Carr et al., 2017). We will revisit queer theory in greater depth in Chapter 13.

Gender Roles and Socialization

Feminists have highlighted the importance of gender roles and socialization in our culture. American society has well-defined roles for men and for women, particularly for European Americans. From their earliest years, children are socialized to conform to these roles. In this regard, the feminist perspective is in close agreement with social learning theory. The feminist sees these roles as constricting to individuals. Essentially, gender roles tell children that there are certain things they may not do, whether telling a girl that she cannot be a physicist or a boy that he cannot be a nurse. Because gender

Queer theory:

A theoretical perspective that one's gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation are not stable, fixed, biologically based characteristics, but rather fluid and dynamic aspects of individuals shaped by culture.



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PHOTO 2.6 Queer theorist Judith Butler. Queer theory has made important contributions to the psychology of women and gender.

roles limit individual potentials and aspirations, feminists believe that we would be better off without such roles, or at least that those roles need to be radically revised.

Anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1935, 1949) have discovered that other cultures have gender roles considerably different from those in the United States; for example, in some cultures men are reputed to be the gossips, and women are thought to be the appropriate ones to carry heavy loads. But despite all the cross-cultural diversity in gender roles, one universal principle seems to hold: Every known society recognizes and elaborates gender differences (Rosaldo, 1974), a point that is consistent with feminists' emphasis on the power and pervasiveness of gender roles.

External Versus Internal Attributions of Problems

Latoya was raped; Sara is depressed after having a baby. Traditional psychological analyses focus on the internal nature and causes of these women's problems. Latoya might be viewed as having brought on the rape by her seductive behavior. Sara might be viewed as having personal problems of adjustment. Feminists are critical of analyses that assume

women's problems are caused by internal or personal factors. Feminists instead view the sources of women's problems as being external. Latoya's problem is recast as having its roots in the rape culture within a society that condones and even encourages male sexual aggression. Sara's problem is recast as having its roots in a society that attaches little value and recognition to being a housewife and mother. This theme of external factors will recur in Chapter 15 in the discussion of feminist therapy.

Consciousness Raising

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the second-wave feminist movement gained momentum, consciousness-raising (C-R) groups were popular. Ideally, such groups begin with a few women sharing their personal feelings and experiences; they then move to a feminist theoretical analysis of these feelings and experiences, and from this should flow action, whether it involves an individual woman restructuring her relationship with her partner or a group of women lobbying for a new law to be passed. In short, this process helps to reveal how the personal is political.

A great deal of consciousness raising now occurs on social media. Consider, for example, the #MeToo movement: In 2006, activist Tarana Burke shared on social media her experience of sexual harassment, and in 2017 actor and activist Alyssa Milano reignited the thread. Within hours of Milano's Twitter post urging women to share their experience of sexual harassment and assault, hundreds of thousands of women posted on social media. Demonstrating the enormous magnitude and extent of this problem, the movement raised consciousness and identified how the personal is political. That is, survivors could recognize that they were not alone or personally to blame for being harassed or assaulted because the problem was much too widespread and clearly linked to power. In turn, this consciousness raising has helped hold some men accountable for sexual

harassment and assault. #MeToo activism continues, with millions of social media posts to date.

The process of consciousness raising remains central to feminism and is a common feature of many gender and women's studies courses. It is a means for women to reflect on their experiences and understand themselves. It also involves a theoretical analysis or lens through which to view one's experiences. Women come to see that what they had perceived as individual problems are actually common and are rooted in external causes.

Diversity of Feminisms

One of the difficulties in writing this section on the feminist perspective is that there are many different kinds of feminism, differing in everything from their theoretical analysis to their model for social change to their vision of the ideal society. One way to approach this diversity is to conceptualize the major types of feminism: (a) liberal feminism, (b) cultural feminism, (c) Marxist or socialist feminism, (d) radical feminism, (e) existentialist and postmodern feminism, (f) women of color feminism, and (g) ecofeminism (Enns & Sinacore, 2001; Tong, 2014). Although a diversity of feminist perspectives exists, and we cannot possibly detail them all here, all feminist theories advocate for gender equality.

Liberal feminism holds that women should have opportunities and rights equal to those of men and that it is possible to achieve this equality by working within the system. The liberal feminist position is exemplified by organizations such as NOW (National Organization for Women), which is the major group that lobbied for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The notion here is that American society is founded on basically good ideals, such as justice and freedom for all, but the justice and freedom need to be extended fully to women. Some would argue that liberal feminism can be credited with many of the educational and legal reforms that have improved women's lives in the United States over the last several decades (Tong, 2018).

Unlike the claims of liberal feminism, which sees men and women as basically alike but in need of equal rights, *cultural feminism* (sometimes called care-focused feminism) argues that women have special, unique qualities that differentiate them from men. The crucial task is to elevate and value those unique qualities, which have been devalued in our patriarchal society. The qualities include nurturing, connectedness, and intuition. Carol Gilligan's theorizing about moral development (see Focus 2.1) is a clear example of cultural or care-focused feminism.

Marxist or socialist feminism argues that the liberal feminist analysis of the problem is superficial and does not get to the deeper roots of the problem. Marxist feminism is grounded in the works of philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and views the oppression of women as just one instance of oppression based on class—oppression that is rooted in capitalism. Marxist feminists such as Heidi Hartmann theorize that patriarchy exists within capitalism, pointing out the extent to which the capitalist system benefits from oppressing women in ways such as wage discrimination. What would happen to the average American corporation if it had to start paying all of its secretaries as much as plumbers earn? (Both jobs require a high school education and a certain amount of manual dexterity and specific skills.) The answer is that most corporations would find their economic structure ruined. Women's situation will not improve, according to this point of view, without a drastic reform of American society, including a complete overhaul

of the capitalist economic system and the concept of private property. Marxist and socialist feminists also argue that unpaid domestic work should no longer be “women’s work” and that men must perform an equal share of such work.

Radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone (1970), Kate Millett (1969), and Andrea Dworkin (1987) view liberal feminism as entirely too optimistic about the sources of women’s oppression and the changes needed to end it. Patriarchal values have saturated society to such an extent that radical change is necessary in everything from social institutions to patterns of thought. Radical feminists are split between *radical-libertarian feminists*—who argue that femininity limits women’s development and instead advocate for androgyny among women—and *radical-cultural feminists*—who argue that femininity and feminine values (such as interdependence and community) are preferable to masculinity and masculine values (such as autonomy and domination) and that men should strive to be more feminine. Given the difficulty of changing social institutions, radical feminists sometimes advocate separatist communities in which women can come together to pursue their work free of men’s oppression.

Existentialist feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, and *postmodern feminists*, such as Hélène Cixous, have been influenced by existential philosophy and the postmodern movement, which questions rationality and objectivity as methods for getting at truth. Language and binaries are also topics for postmodern critique. Postmodern feminism has tended to be less focused on social action; rather, it is an academic movement that seeks to reform thought and scholarship. It is particularly concerned with the issue of epistemology, which is the question of how people—whether laypeople or scientists—know. How do we know about truth and reality? Traditional science has been based on positivism as its epistemology. Positivism claims that we can know reality directly through rational, objective scientific methods, a clear contrast to the social constructionism advocated by postmodern feminists.

Women of color feminism highlights the unique experiences of women of color as members of multiply marginalized groups and thus promotes a more inclusive and intersectional feminist perspective. Thus, this type of feminism is often critical of White feminists for focusing on “universal” female experiences such as reproductive justice and neglecting the diversity of women’s experiences (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Enns & Sinacore, 2001). We discuss women of color feminisms in depth in Chapter 4.

Ecofeminism links women’s oppression to human beings’ domination of nature and is articulated by activist/scholars such as Ynestra King and Vandana Shiva. Women are often culturally tied to nature, and ecofeminists point out that patriarchy—which is hierarchical, dualistic, and oppressive—harms both women and nature (Tong, 2014; Warren, 1987). Ecofeminism has deep roots in the environmental justice movement and the work of environmentalists such as Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold, as well as in activism regarding the disproportionate burden of poor people and people of color. Thus, issues such as climate change and sustainable development are understood as intertwined with gender, racial, and class equality and well-being, as well as colonialism. There are multiple perspectives within ecofeminism, but values such as interdependence and interconnection are central to all of them.

The point here is that not all feminists and not all feminist theories are alike. Instead, there is a wide spectrum of theory and practice. Most of the academic feminist psychologists who have contributed to the psychology of women and gender would be classified as liberal feminists or postmodern feminists, but certainly there is a diversity of feminist approaches within the discipline.

Evaluation of Feminist Theories

Feminist theories span many disciplines and were not specifically proposed as scientific theories that could be tested, but rather as critical theories that articulate a prescription for social change. This means that some of their propositions are difficult to evaluate scientifically. Yet many scientific theories have been reformulated with a feminist approach or perspective, and we review the research on those reformulated theories throughout this book. For example, the notion of men as a class having power over women will recur in several studies mentioned later in this book; an example is gender-based violence such as rape (see Chapter 14). Also, the data on issues of sexuality for women are the focus in several later chapters (10, 11, 12, and 13).

In Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented diverse theoretical perspectives put forward in an effort to explain gender development. They operate from vastly different underlying assumptions and provide considerably different views of women and gender. As in much of psychology, the roles of nature and nurture are debated by theories of gender development, and interactionist theories, such as cognitive-developmental theory and social role theory, tend to gather the most evidence. There is no denying that biology is relevant to gender (indeed, that's the focus of Chapter 10!), but humans are extremely plastic and adaptable to their environment, so nature is rarely the full story. Our experience of that environment, including the social and political context of our lives, also plays an indisputable role in gender development.

EXPERIENCE THE RESEARCH

GENDER SCHEMA THEORY

Ask six friends to participate, individually, in a memory study that you are conducting. Collect the data in a quiet place that is free from distractions. Then give the following set of instructions to the person:

I am going to read to you a list of 12 words. As soon as I finish, I would like you to recall the words for me, in any order. I want to see how many words you remember.

Then read the following words out loud, in exactly this order:

gorilla (M) stepping (N) ant (N)
Michael (M) butterfly (F) Mary (F)

blushing (F) trousers (M) bull (M)
hurling (M) bikini (F) dress (F)

Read the words slowly and clearly, with about one second between each. Write the words down as your friend recalls them, in exactly the order they are recalled. If the person responds quickly, you may need to abbreviate the words.

Does the pattern of results for your friends look like those that Sandra Bem obtained for her research on gender schemas? That is, did people cluster the words into groups on the basis of gender associations (*butterfly* and *dress* close together, *trousers* and *bull* close together) or on the basis of other categories (*trousers* and *dress* together, *butterfly* and *bull* together)?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

There are diverse theoretical perspectives from which we can study the psychology of women and gender. Each has strengths and weaknesses to consider. Psychoanalytic theory was first formulated by Freud, who theorized that gender differences in the development of the super-ego stem from girls' incomplete resolution of the Electra complex. Theorists such as Horney and Chodorow offered feminist approaches to psychoanalytic theory.

Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes the roles of reinforcement, punishment, observational learning, and imitation in the process of gender typing. Bandura's reformulation of this theory incorporated cognitive processes such as attention, self-regulation, and self-efficacy.

Cognitive-developmental theory emphasizes the development of gender constancy—the understanding that gender is a stable and consistent part of oneself—in gender typing. Bem's gender schema theory proposes that children develop gender schemas—a set of gender-linked

associations that filter and interpret incoming information—which are essential to gender typing.

Sociobiology and evolutionary psychology apply Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection to social behaviors. These theories emphasize parental investment and sexual selection in the development of gender differences. By contrast, social role theory, proposed by Eagly and Wood, emphasizes not cross-cultural universals, but rather the variability across cultures in patterns of gender differences. This perspective proposes that a society's division of labor by gender fosters the development of psychological gender differences.

A diversity of feminist theories exists, but they share common themes and the goal of gender equality. Feminist theories emphasize men's power over women and the ways that other social categories, such as social class, race, and sexual orientation, intersect with gender. Gender and sexuality are understood as socially constructed, as in queer theory.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Fine, Cordelia. (2017). *Testosterone Rex: Myths of sex, science, and society*. New York, NY: Norton. Fine reviews research from evolutionary science, psychology, and neuroscience to examine myths about the evolution of differences between men and women.

Tong, Rosemarie, & Botts, Tina Fernandes. (2018). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction* (5th ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press. A clear and comprehensive introduction to the diversity of feminist theories.