Sex and Gender

CHAPTER 9

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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In North America, it is common for parents and others to remark on how different their little girls or boys are. Even newborn boys and girls are commonly described as having different personalities. And yet trained observers watching infants wrapped in neutral-colored blankets, instead of pink for girls and blue for boys, cannot detect much difference at all. The underlying belief is that boys and girls are born with different natures. This is captured in an old nursery rhyme:

What are little boys made of?
"Snips and snails, and puppy dogs' tails
That's what little boys are made of!"
What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and all things nice
That's what little girls are made of!"[1]

Different characterizations are not unique to North American culture; boys and girls are, it appears, perceived differently the world over. Moreover, societies usually have fairly clear ideas about the roles that females and males should have during different life stages. Along with different gender roles at every stage of life comes another mystifying fact: Women nearly everywhere have fewer social advantages than men. Why? Is there a fundamental difference between the sexes, other than the observable physical differences, that explains both gender roles and the relative status of the genders? Or are gender differences created by society to serve the interests of the community—or of men?

It was the beginning of the women's movement in the 1960s that prompted scholars to seriously consider the part society plays in creating gender differences in behavior and the type of roles females and males are assigned. Although it may seem that the debate is about nature *or* nurture, most social scientists recognize that it is nearly impossible to disentangle the two when parents and others do not treat females and males exactly the same way.

One way anthropologists begin to try to understand what might be cultural is to examine similarities and variations in a phenomenon cross-culturally. In the following pages, we will look at how concepts about gender vary across many cultures. We will also review what is known about how and why females and males may differ physically, in gender roles, and in personality. Finally, we will discuss another topic of infinite curiosity: How and why sexual behavior and attitudes about sex vary from culture to culture.

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Humans are born either female or male, with very rare exceptions. And each individual possesses different reproductive organs, a fact of life that humans share with most animal species. But having different organs of reproduction does not explain why males and females may also differ in other physical ways. Unlike some other animal species, such as pigeons, gulls, and chipmunks, in which the two sexes differ little in appearance, human males and females typically also differ physically.[2] In other words, the fact that we are a species with two sexes does not explain why human females and males came to look different, nor does it explain why human males and females should differ in behavior or be treated differently by society. Indeed, as we mentioned earlier, females usually have fewer advantages than males, which is why we were careful in the preceding chapter to say that egalitarian societies have no *social groups* with unequal access to resources, power, and prestige. In fact, within social groups, such as families, even egalitarian societies usually give males greater access to some rewards. Some **gender stratification**, or unequal access by different genders to prestige, authority, power, rights and economic resources, appears to be a cultural universal. However, societies differ in the degree and type of gender stratification.

Gender stratification The degree of unequal access by the different genders to prestige, authority, power, rights, and economic resources.

Gender differences Differences between females and males that reflect cultural expectations and experiences.

Sex differences The typical differences between females and males that are most likely due to biological differences.

Because many of the differences between females and males appear to reflect cultural expectations and experiences, researchers now usually prefer to speak of **gender differences**, reserving the term **sex differences** for purely biological differences.[3] Unfortunately, because biological and cultural influences are not always clearly separable, it is sometimes difficult to

know which term to use. As we discuss differences and similarities between females and males, keep in mind that not all cultures conceive of gender as including just two categories. Sometimes "maleness" and "femaleness" are thought of as opposite ends of a continuum, or there might be three or more categories of gender, such as "female," "male," and "other."[4]

Gender Concepts

9.1 Describe variation in gender concepts.

In the United States and many Western societies, there are only two genders—female and male. Your gender is assigned at birth based on external biological attributes. However, not all individuals feel comfortable with their gender assignment. The term *transgender* is now used to describe people who do not feel that their assigned gender fits them well.

The division into just two genders—male/female—is very common cross-culturally. But a strict dichotomy is far from universal. Some societies, like the Cheyenne Native Americans of the Great Plains, recognized male, female, and a third gender, referred to by the Cheyenne as "two-spirits." (Europeans referred to this third gender type generally as a *berdache*.[5]) "Two-spirit" people were usually biological males. The gender status of "two-spirit" was often recognized after a boy returned from his vision quest, a preadolescent rite of passage of several days that he spent in isolation in the wilderness. The boy's "vision," or epiphany, would lead him to become a two-spirit person. He would wear women's dress and take on many of the activities of women. A two-spirit might even be taken as a second wife by a man, but whether the man and the two-spirit person engaged in sex is not known. The role of a "two-spirit" person was not equivalent to that of a woman. Indeed, two-spirits played unique gender roles at weddings and childbirth. Accounts of "two-spirit" biological females who take on the role of men are less common, but they do occur in a number of native North American societies, such as the Kaska of Yukon Territory, the Klamath of southern Oregon, and the Mohave of the Colorado River area in the southwestern United States. These biological female "two-spirits" could marry women, and such relationships were lesbian relationships.[6]

In Oman, there is a third gender role called *xanith*. Anatomically male, *xaniths* speak of themselves as "women." However, *xaniths* have their own distinctive dress; they wear clothes that are neither male nor female but somewhere in between. Men in Oman typically wear white clothes and women bright patterns, whereas *xaniths* wear unpatterned pastels. Men have short hair, women long, and *xaniths* keep theirs medium-length. Omani women are generally secluded in their houses and can go out only with permission from their husbands, but a *xanith* is free to come and go and to work as a servant and/or a homosexual prostitute. Unlike a "two-spirit," who is likely to maintain a third gender role for life, a *xanith* may change gender role. If a *xanith* decides to marry and is able to have intercourse with his bride, he becomes a "man." An older *xanith* who is no longer attractive may decide to become an "old man."[7]

Physique and Physiology

9.2 Identify differences in physique and physiology between males and females.

Sexually dimorphic
A marked difference in size and appearance between males and females of a species.

As we have noted, males and females cannot readily be distinguished in some animal species. Although they differ in chromosome makeup and in their external and internal organs of reproduction, they do not differ otherwise. In contrast, humans are **sexually dimorphic**—that is, the two sexes of our species are generally different in size and appearance. Females have proportionately wider pelvises. Males typically are taller and have heavier skeletons. Females have a larger proportion of their body weight in fat; males have a larger proportion of body weight in muscle. Males typically have greater grip strength, proportionately larger hearts and lungs, and greater aerobic capacity (greater intake of oxygen during strenuous activity).

North American culture tends to view "taller" and "more muscled" as better, which may reflect a bias toward males. But how did these differences come about? Natural selection may have favored these traits in males but selected against them in females. Females achieve their ultimate height shortly after puberty, but boys continue to grow for years after puberty. Because females bear children, selection may have favored earlier cessation of growth, and therefore less ultimate height so that the nutritional needs of a fetus would

not compete with a growing mother's needs.[8] Similarly, there is some evidence that females are less affected than males by nutritional shortages, presumably because they tend to be shorter and have proportionately more fat.[9] Natural selection may also have favored more proportionate "fatness" in females because it resulted in greater reproductive success.

Athletes can build up their muscle strength and increase their aerobic work capacity through training. Given that fact, cultural factors, such as how much a society expects and allows males and females to engage in muscular activity, could influence the degree to which females and males differ muscularly and in aerobic capacity. Similar training may account for the recent trend toward decreasing differences between females and males in certain athletic events, such as marathons and swim meets, even when we account for the hormonal differences that enable males to develop greater muscle mass. When it comes to female and male physique and physiology, what we see may be the result of both culture and genes.[10]

9.3 Explain differences in gender roles.

Gender Roles

Who Does What Work?

In the chapter on economic systems, we noted that all societies assign or divide labor somewhat differently between females and males. Because role assignments have a clear cultural component, we speak of them as **gender roles**. What is of particular interest about the gender division of labor is not so much that every society has different work for males and females but, rather, that so many societies divide up work in similar ways. The question, then, is: Why are there universal or near-universal patterns in such assignments?

Gender roles Roles that are culturally assigned to genders.

The world of work has changed for much of the world and continues to change. We know a considerable amount about division of labor by gender in societies that make or made their living by collecting or producing their own food. We know less as yet about cross-cultural patterns in industrial and post-industrial societies. Table 9.1 summarizes which activities are performed by which gender in all or almost all societies, which activities are usually performed by one gender, and which activities are commonly assigned to either gender or both. If every culture assigned work arbitrarily to the genders, the table would reveal no patterns. Although many tasks are assigned to both genders (the middle column), clearly some patterns are worldwide. One of the most striking is in primary subsistence activities; males almost always hunt and trap animals, and females usually gather wild plants. Do this and the other distributions of activities in the table suggest why females and males generally do different things? Scholars have suggested four explanations or theories that we label *strength theory*, *compatibility-with-child-care theory*, *economy-of-effort theory*, and *expendability theory*.

Strength Theory The idea that males generally possess greater strength and a superior capacity to mobilize their strength in quick bursts of energy (because of greater aerobic work capacity) is called the strength theory. Males may best perform activities that require lifting heavy objects (hunting large animals, butchering, clearing land, or working with stone, metal, or lumber), throwing weapons, and running with great speed (as in hunting). And none of the activities females usually perform, with the possible exception of collecting firewood, seem to require the same degree of physical strength or quick bursts of energy. But the strength theory is not completely convincing, if only because it cannot readily explain all the observed patterns. It is not clear, for example, that the male activities of trapping small animals, collecting wild honey, or making musical instruments require physical strength. Moreover, as we will see shortly, women do hunt in some societies, suggesting that differences in strength cannot play a very important role.

Compatibility-with-Child-Care Theory Males are capable of caring for infants, of course, but for obvious biological reasons, they cannot breast-feed. In most societies, women breast-feed their children, on average, for two years, so the compatibility-with-child-care theory suggests that for much of human history it would have been maladaptive to have women take on roles that interfere with their ability to feed their child regularly or put their child in danger while taking care of them. The tasks women perform may also need to be ones that can be stopped and resumed if an infant needs care.[11]

TABLE 9.1 Worldwide Patterns in the Division of Labor by Gender

	Primary Subsistence Activities	Secondary Subsistence and Household Activities	Other Activities
Nearly always males	Hunt and trap animals, large and small		Lumber Make boats Mine and quarry Make musical instruments Make bone, horn, and shell objects Engage in combat
Usually males	Fish Herd large animals Collect wild honey Clear land and prepare soil for planting	Butcher animals	Build houses Make nets and rope Exercise political leadership
Either gender or both	Collect shellfish Care for small animals Plant and tend crops Harvest crops Milk animals	Preserve meat and fish	Prepare skins Make leather products, baskets, mats, clothing, and pottery
Usually females	Gather wild plants	Care for children Cook Prepare vegetable foods, drinks, and dairy products Launder Fetch water Collect fuel Spin yarn	
Nearly always females		Care for infants	

Sources: Murdock and Provost 1973, 203–25; Whyte 1978a, 217 (political leadership and warfare); Weisner and Gallimore 1977, 169–80 (child care).

The compatibility theory may explain why *only* infant care is listed in Table 9.1 as almost always woman's work. Nursing and caring for their infants and other children may have so consumed women's lives that, until recently, there may have been practically no other universal or near-universal women-only activities. This theory may also explain why men usually perform such tasks as hunting, trapping, fishing, collecting honey, lumbering, and mining. Those tasks are dangerous for infants to be around and, in any case, would be difficult to coordinate with infant care. A group may also make fine distinctions in the division of labor that are consistent with the compatibility theory: Among the Aché hunter-gatherers of Paraguay, for example, women collect the type of honey produced by stingless bees, while men collect other honey.[12]

Finally, the compatibility theory may explain why men seem to take over certain crafts in societies that have full-time specialization. Although the distinction is not shown in Table 9.1, crafts such as basket, mat, and pottery making tend to be women's activities in noncommercial societies but men's activities in societies with full-time craft specialists.[13] Similarly, weaving is typically a female activity unless it is produced for trade.[14] Full-time specialization and production for trade may be less compatible with child care. Cooking is a good example in our own society. Many women are excellent cooks and traditionally did most of the cooking at home, but chefs and bakers tend to be men. In order to work as chefs, women would require caretakers for their babies and young children, and shorter hours than chefs and bakers typically work.

The compatibility theory does not explain, however, why men usually prepare soil for planting, make objects out of wood, or work bone, horn, and shell. All of those tasks could probably be stopped to tend to a child, and none of them is any more dangerous to children nearby than is cooking.

Economy-of-Effort Theory Why do males tend to perform tasks such as woodcarving that could be done by women who also tend children? The economy-of-effort theory may help explain task patterns that the strength and compatibility theories do not readily address. For example, it may be advantageous for men to make wooden musical instruments because

Females usually care for young children, but sometimes males do more as this father in Shanghai, China.

they generally lumber.[15] Lumbering may give men more knowledge about the physical properties of various woods and make it more likely that they know how to work with different woods. The economy-of-effort interpretation also suggests that it would be advantageous for one gender to perform tasks that are located near each other. That is, if women have to be near home to nurse and take care of young children, it would be economical for them to perform other chores in or near the home.

Expendability Theory The idea that men, rather than women, will tend to do the dangerous work in a society because the loss of men is not as great a disadvantage reproductively as the loss of women is called the expendability theory. If some men lose their lives in hunting, deep-water fishing, mining, quarrying, lumbering, and the like, reproduction need not suffer as long as most fertile women have sexual access to men—for example, if the society permits two or more women to be married to the same man.[16] If an activity is dangerous, why would anybody, male or female, be willing to do it? Perhaps it is because societies glorify and reward some such acts.

Theoretical Weaknesses The productive and domestic tasks that societies everywhere have carried out are a well-established body of knowledge. We also have data on whether men, women, or both perform each task. The theories that we discussed are all, to some extent, based on these data. And singly or in combination, each theory seems to explain much of the division of labor by gender; yet each theory has weaknesses. Critics of the strength theory have pointed out that women in some societies do engage in very heavy labor.[17] They argue that if women in some societies can develop the strength to do such work, then perhaps strength is more a function of training than has been believed.

The compatibility theory's central idea that labor is divided to conform to the requirements of child care is also debatable. In fact, the reverse can be true: Child care can conform to the demands of other work. Women who spend a good deal of time in agricultural work outside the home, for example, often ask others to watch and feed their infants while they are unavailable to nurse.[18] For example, agricultural work in the mountainous areas of Nepal would seem to be especially incompatible with child care. Heavy loads must be carried up and down steep slopes, the fields are far apart, and labor takes up most of the day. Yet women perform this work anyway and leave their infants with others for long stretches of time.[19]

In some societies, women hunt—one of the activities considered most incompatible with child care and generally done only by men. Many Agta women of the Philippines seem able to manage both tasks. They regularly hunt wild pig and deer; and women alone or in groups kill almost 30 percent of the large game in the Agta diet.[20] The compatibility theory, like the other proposed explanations for the division of labor by gender, assumes that women do not perform work that may jeopardize their reproductive ability. Yet Agta women who hunt and even take their nursing babies on hunting trips do not have lower reproductive rates than the women who choose not to hunt. To be fair, the circumstances

under which these women hunt may be more compatible with child care: The hunting grounds are only about a half hour from camp; dogs accompany them to assist in the hunting and protect them and their babies; and because they tend to hunt in groups, others can help carry their babies, as well as the carcasses. However, these factors, too, suggest that women can effectively accommodate the differing needs of two competing tasks.

Hunting by women is also fairly common among the Aka, forest foragers in the Central African Republic. Aka women participate in and sometimes lead cooperative net-hunting, in which an area is circled and animals are flushed out and caught in nets. The women spend approximately 18 percent of their time net-hunting, which is more time than Aka men devote to the task.[21] In the Canadian subarctic, teams of Chipewyan women would hunt small animals, such as muskrats or rabbits, and would commonly join their husbands to hunt large animals, such as moose. Some Chipewyan precautions suggest that the compatibility between hunting and child care was a consideration, however. Women would avoid hunting moose after their fourth or fifth month of pregnancy. They usually joined hunting teams as newlyweds and after their childbearing years. Women also did not participate in long-distance hunts.[22]

As these examples of women who hunt and who work in agriculture suggest, we would be in a better position to evaluate the various theories and, perhaps, to propose one if we knew more precisely what each activity humans perform requires. Without a systematic study of how much strength is required for each task, how dangerous each task is, or which tasks can be interrupted for child care and later resumed, theories about the way societies divide up their work can be little more than guesses.

Changing Labor and Gender Roles As fewer societies remain isolated and more adopt technologies to help them perform certain tasks, both the tasks and who performs them are bound to change. As we know from our own and other industrial societies, when machines replace human strength, when women have fewer children, and when child care can be delegated, the division of labor changes, as do the tasks that need to be performed. Yet, remarkably, labor appears to divide by gender even in a post-industrial world.

Relative Contributions to Work: Who Works More?

9.4 Analyze relative gender differences in term of contributions to work.

Most contemporary societies typically equate "work" with earning money. Until relatively recently, "homemaker" did not count as an occupation in the United States, for example. Yet, as we discussed in the chapters on food-getting and economics, we humans lived in subsistence economies for most of our history, and the invention of money is relatively recent. Most societies known to anthropology, whether they were foragers or food producers, focused primarily on the basic necessities.

When anthropologists research the division of labor by gender, they usually focus on **primary subsistence activities**—gathering, hunting, fishing, herding, and farming. As if there were a predisposed bias against household work, less attention has been paid to gender contributions toward **secondary subsistence activities**, such as food preparation for eating or storing. Yet, with a few exceptions, food can never be consumed without some preparation. For example, hunting cannot contribute much to the diet unless the meat is brought home (cut up or carried whole), skinned, cleaned, prepared for cooking, and then cooked. If the animal is large, the meat must be prepared for distribution and/or storage. And as skins and other parts are often used for clothing or tools, someone has to prepare those. As Hetty Jo Brumbach and Robert Jarvenpa point out, the Western model of hunting focuses on the "kill" (perhaps derived from the notion of sport-hunting) and ignores the complexity of processes associated with it. This view may hide women's role in "hunting" and emphasize the male's role as "hunter."[23]

Primary subsistence activities The food-getting activities: gathering, hunting, fishing, herding, and agriculture.

Secondary subsistence activities Activities that involve the preparation and processing of food either to make it edible or to store it.

Overall Work

We can also ask whether males or females generally do more work. We do not yet have that many studies of how females and males spend their time, but studies of horticultural

and intensive agricultural societies so far suggest that, if we count all the kinds of economic activities shown in Table 9.1, women typically work more total hours per day than men.[24] We do not know if this is a truly cross-cultural universal. However, we do know that in many societies where women earn wages, they are still responsible for the bulk of the household work as well as the child care at home.

Subsistence Work

Primary subsistence activities are by nature generally located farther from the family's dwelling, and female and male contributions of this kind of work vary across cultures. Because the length of time spent on primary subsistence activities is generally not available, we estimate how much each gender contributes to the diet in terms of caloric intake from primary subsistence activities.

In some societies, women have traditionally contributed more to the economy than men both in terms of time spent and caloric intake. For example, among the Tchambuli of New Guinea in the 1930s, the women did all of the fishing—going out early in the morning by canoe to their fish traps and returning when the sun was hot. Some of the catch was traded for sago (a starch) and sugarcane, and it was the women who went on the long canoe trips to do the trading.[25]

In many farming societies, women can do some agriculture and take care of their young children at the same time, as this mother in Zambia demonstrates.

In contrast, men did almost all of the primary subsistence work among the Toda of India. As they were described early in the 20th century, they depended for subsistence almost entirely on the dairy products of their water buffalo, either by using the products directly or by selling them for grain. Only men tended the buffalo and also prepared the dairy products, which women were not permitted to do. Women performed mostly housework, preparing the purchased grain for cooking, cleaning house, and decorating clothing.[26]

A survey of a wide variety of societies has revealed that these extremes are not common. Usually both women and men contribute a good deal toward primary food-getting activities, but men usually contribute more in most societies.[27] Because women are almost always occupied with infant- and child-care responsibilities, it is not surprising that men usually perform most of the primary subsistence work, which generally has to be done away from the home.

Why do women in some societies do as much or more than men in primary subsistence work? Some of the variation is explained by the society's types of food-getting activity. In societies that depend on hunting, fishing, and herding—generally male activities—for most of their calories, men usually contribute more than women.[28] For example, among the Inuit, who traditionally depended mostly on hunting and fishing, as well as among the Toda, who depended mostly on herding, men did most of the primary subsistence work. In societies that depend on gathering, primarily women's work, women tend to do most of the food-getting.[29] The !Kung are an example. But the predominant type of food-getting is not always predictive. For example, among the Tchambuli, who depended mostly on fishing, women did most of the work. Most societies depend upon some

form of food production rather than foraging. With the exception of clearing land, preparing the soil, and herding large animals, which are usually men's tasks, men, women, or both do the work of planting, crop tending (weeding, irrigating), and harvesting (see Table 9.1). We need some explanation, then, of why women do most of the farming work in some societies but men do it in others. Different patterns predominate in different areas of the world. In Africa, south of the Sahara, women generally do most of the farming. In much of Asia and Europe and the areas around the Mediterranean, men do more.[30]

The type of agriculture may help explain some of the variation. Men's contribution to primary subsistence tends to be much higher than women's in intensive agricultural societies, particularly with plow agriculture. In contrast, women's contribution is relatively high compared with men's and sometimes higher in horticultural societies. According to Ester Boserup, when population increases and there is pressure to make more intensive use of the land, cultivators begin to use the plow and irrigation, and males start to do more.[31] But it is not clear why.

Why should women not contribute a lot to farming just because plows are used? In trying to answer this question, most researchers shift to considering how much time males and females spend in various farming tasks rather than estimating the total caloric contribution of females versus males. The reason for this shift is that gender contribution to farming varies substantially over the various phases of the production sequence, as well as from one crop to another. Thus, the total amount of time females versus males work at farming tasks is easier to estimate than how much each gender contributes to the diet in terms of calories. How would caloric contribution be judged, for example, if men clear the land and plow, women plant and weed, and both harvest the crop?

Plow agriculture could increase male contribution to subsistence because plowing takes longer and minimizes weeding time. Cross-culturally, men usually clear land. (This does not mean that women are not able to plow, for there are examples of women plowing when necessary.[32]) It has been estimated that, in one district in Nigeria, 100 days of work are required to clear one acre of virgin land for plowing by tractor; only 20 days are required to prepare the land for shifting cultivation. Weeding is a task that probably can be combined with child care, and perhaps women may have mostly performed it previously for that reason.[33] But the fact that men do the plowing, which may take a lot of time, does not explain why women do relatively fewer farming tasks, including weeding, in societies that have the plow.[34]

Another explanation for the apparent decrease in women's contribution in intensive agriculture is that they have less time to spend in the fields. Intensive agriculturalists rely heavily on such grain crops as corn, wheat, and oats, which require a great deal of preparation and processing, tasks commonly performed by women. Grains are usually dried before storing. To be edible, dried grains must either be cooked in water for a long time or be preprocessed to cook faster. Cooking requires collecting water and firewood, neither of which is usually close by, and both of which are women's tasks. In addition, there is more cleaning of pots and utensils to be done. Soaking, grinding, or pounding can reduce cooking time for hard grains, but the process that speeds up cooking the most—grinding—is itself very time-consuming unless done by machine.[35] Then there is also child care and the additional housework that children entail.

Household work may also increase substantially with intensive agriculture because women in such societies have *more* children than women in horticultural societies.[36] If we add child care and the housework that children entail to the intensive food processing and cooking the women undertake, it is easy to understand why women cannot contribute more time than men, or as much time as men, to intensive agriculture. Yet women's contribution, though less than men's in the fields, is nonetheless substantial. In addition to working at home, women in such societies may labor outside the home four and a half hours a day, seven days a week, on average.[37]

Unlike intensive agricultural societies, those that subsist on horticulture rely a great deal on women's contributions. Why? Women in horticultural societies may not have as much household work as intensive agricultural women, but neither do the men. Why, then, don't men do relatively more in horticulture also? In fact, men in horticultural societies are often drawn away from cultivation into other types of activities. One of the most common is warfare, in which all able-bodied men are expected to participate.

There is evidence that, if males are engaged in warfare when primary subsistence work has to be done, then the women will do work.[38] Men may also be removed from primary subsistence work if they have to work in distant towns and cities for wages or if they periodically go on long-distance trading trips.[39]

When women contribute a lot to primary food-getting activities, we might expect effects on their childrearing. Several cross-cultural studies suggest that, indeed, this expectation is correct. In contrast to societies with a low female contribution to primary subsistence (in terms of contributing calories), highly contributing females feed their infants solid foods earlier, enabling others besides the mothers to feed them.[40] Also girls in such societies are likely to be trained to be industrious, probably to help their mothers, and female babies are more valued.[41]

Political Leadership and Warfare

9.5 Discuss gender differences in terms of political leadership and warfare cross-culturally.

In almost every known society, men rather than women tend to lead in the political arena. One cross-cultural survey found that only men were leaders in about 88 percent of the surveyed societies. Among the 10 percent of societies that had women in leadership positions, they were either outnumbered by or less powerful than the male leaders.[42] In the remaining 2 percent, leadership was fairly evenly distributed between men and women. If we look at sovereign nations, not cultures, the mean average of women in national parliaments and legislative bodies is 19 percent.[43]

Whether or not we consider warfare to be part of the political sphere of life, we find an almost universal dominance of males in that arena. In 87 percent of the world's societies in the anthropological record, women never participate actively in war.[44] Among modern nation-states, as of 2013, only 12 countries allow military women in combat.[45] The United States only recently changed its policy to allow such participation. (See the box "Why Do Some Societies Allow Women to Participate in Combat?" for a discussion of women in combat in the remaining 13 percent of societies.)

Even in ***matrilineal*** societies, in which the descent of a kin group is passed down through the mother and the female ancestors, formal political positions are usually held by men. Among the matrilineal Iroquois of what is now New York State, women controlled the resources and had considerable informal influence on political affairs. They could nominate, elect, and impeach their male representatives. Women could decide between life and death for prisoners of war, forbid the men of their households to go to war, and intervene to bring about peace. Nonetheless, the highest political body among the League of the Iroquois, which comprised five tribal groups, was a council of 50 male chiefs.[46]

Why have men (at least so far) almost always dominated the political sphere of life? Some scholars suggest that men's role in warfare gives them the edge in political leadership, particularly because they control weapons, an important resource.[47] Evidence suggests, however, that force is rarely used to obtain leadership positions;[48] superior strength is not the deciding factor. Rather, warfare may be related to political leadership for another reason. War affects survival, and it occurs regularly in most societies. Therefore, decisions about war may be among the most important kinds of political actions that occur in most societies. It stands to reason that the people who know the most about warfare make these decisions.

Two other factors may be involved in male predominance in politics. One is the generally greater height of men. Why height should be a factor in leadership is unclear, but studies suggest that taller people are more likely to be leaders.[49] Finally, there is the possibility that men dominate politics because they spend more time in the outside world than do women. Men's activities typically take them farther from home, whereas women tend to work more around the home. If societies choose leaders at least in part because of what they know about the larger world, then men will have some advantage. In support of this reasoning, Patricia Draper found that in settled !Kung groups, women no longer engaged in long-distance gathering, and they seemed to have lost much of their former influence in decision-making.[50] Involvement in child care may also detract from influence. In a

Perspectives on Gender

Why Do Some Societies Allow Women to Participate in Combat?

There have been some female warriors throughout history. In the 18th and 19th centuries, women made up one wing of the standing army in the West African Kingdom of Dahomey, for example, and constituted one-third of the armed forces at one point. Yet most societies and most countries have excluded women from combat, and some have excluded women from all military activities or planning.

Why, then, do some societies allow women to be warriors? Psychologist David Adams compared about 70 societies studied by anthropologists to try to answer that question. He found that women are active warriors at least occasionally in 13 percent of the sample societies. In native North America, the Comanche, Crow, Delaware, Fox, Gros Ventre, and Navajo had women warriors. In the Pacific, there were active warrior women among the Maori of New Zealand, on Majuro Atoll in the Marshall Islands, and among the Orokaiva of New Guinea. In none of these societies were the warriors usually women, but women were allowed to engage in combat if they wanted to.

How are societies with women warriors different from those that exclude women from combat? They differ in one of two ways. Either they conduct purely external wars, fighting only against people in other societies, or they marry within their own community in a society. Adams argues that either of these two conditions, which are not particularly common, will preclude conflicts of interest between wives and husbands. In purely external war, couples who come from the same society (though not necessarily the same community) will share the same loyalties. If war occurs internally, between communities and larger groups within a society, there will be no conflict of interest between husband and wife as long as they grew up in the same community. In short, wives who do not have allegiances in the "enemy" camp can, by implication, be trusted to fight alongside their husbands.

In most societies, internal war takes place at least occasionally, but wives also usually come from other communities. If women in such societies engaged in combat, they might have to fight against their fathers, paternal uncles, and brothers. Wouldn't we expect a person in such a situation to have torn loyalties and try to warn her kin of planned attacks against them? The potential for disloyalty would explain why women in such societies are forbidden to make or handle weapons or go near meetings in which war plans are discussed.

Many countries today engage in purely external war. Other things being equal, we might extrapolate from Adams's findings and expect barriers against woman warriors to disappear completely in such societies. In 2011 Australia and in 2013 the United States joined 10 other countries in allowing women in combat. It may be a trend, but most countries disallow such participation, and woman warriors are rare. Even in Adams's study, not all societies with purely external war or intra-community marriage had woman warriors. Other conditions may have to be present before women and men participate equally in combat. We may have to consider the degree to which the society seeks to maximize reproduction (and therefore protect women from danger) and the degree to which the society depends on women for subsistence during wartime.

Inevitably, one inquiry about women and society leads to other compelling questions. Does greater participation in the military increase women's presence in politics? In wartime, do women participate more or less in politics? Does the nature of war change when women play an active role in politics or in the military?

Source: From D. B. Adams 1983; J. S. Goldstein 2001; 2004; Mutrine 2013; Siegel 2011.

study of village leadership among the Kayapo of Brazil, Dennis Werner found that women with heavy child-care burdens were less influential than women not as involved in child care; he suggests that they had fewer friends and missed many details of what was going on in the village.[51]

These various explanations suggest why men generally dominate politics, but we still need to explain why women participate in politics more in some societies than in others. Marc Ross investigated this question in a cross-cultural survey of 90 societies.[52] In that sample, the degree of female participation in politics varied considerably. For example, among the Mende of Sierra Leone, women regularly held high office, but among the Azande of Zaire, women took no part in public life. One factor that predicts the exclusion of women from politics is the organization of communities around male kin. As we will see later, when they marry, women usually have to leave their communities and move to their husband's household. If women are outsiders joining a community with many related males, the males will have political advantages because of their inside knowledge of their community's members and its past events.

9.6 Analyze relative status among women cross-culturally.

The Relative Status of Women

In the small Iraqi town of Daghara, women and men live very separate lives.[53] In many respects, women appear to have very little status. Like women in some other parts of the Islamic world, women in Daghara live mostly in seclusion, staying in their houses and interior courtyards. If they must go out, they can do so only with male approval and must shroud their faces and bodies in long black cloaks. These cloaks must be worn in mixed company, even at home. Women are essentially excluded from political activities. Legally, they are considered to be under the authority of their fathers and husbands. Even the sexuality of women is controlled; there is strict emphasis on virginity before marriage. Because women are not permitted even casual conversations with strange men, the possibilities of extramarital or even premarital relationships are very slight. In contrast, hardly any sexual restrictions are imposed on men.

But some societies, such as the Mbuti of Zaire, seem to approach equal status for males and females. Like most food collectors, the Mbuti have no formal political organization to make decisions or to settle disputes. When public disputes occur, both women and men take part in the uproar. Not only do women make their positions known, but their opinions are often heeded. Even in domestic quarrels involving physical violence between husband and wife, others usually intervene to stop them, regardless of who hit whom first.[54] Women control the use of dwellings; they usually have equal say over the disposal of resources they or the men collect, over the upbringing of their children, and about whom their children should marry. One of the few signs of inequality is that women are somewhat more restricted than men with respect to extramarital sex.[55]

But many social scientists have asked why the *status* of women appears to vary from one society to another. There are many theories about why women have relatively high or low status. One of the most common theories is that women's status will be high when they contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities. This theory would predict that women should have very little status when food-getting depends largely on hunting, herding, or intensive agriculture. A second theory suggests that men will be more valued and esteemed than women where warfare is particularly important. A third theory suggests that men will have higher status where there are centralized political hierarchies, since men usually play the dominant role in politics. The fourth theory predicts that women will have higher status where kin groups and couples' places of residence after marriage are organized around women.

One of the problems in evaluating these theories is that decisions have to be made about the meaning of *status*. There are probably as many definitions of status as there are researchers interested in the topic. To some, the relative status of the sexes means how much value society confers on females versus males. To others, it means how much power and authority men and women have relative to each other. To still others, it means what kinds of rights women and men possess to do what they want to do.

Many of the terms, such as value, power, authority, and rights, mean something slightly different. And we have to access what domain we are talking about—for example, with respect to authority, do we mean authority in the home, in the public arena, in the kin group, or in religious life? Do all these aspects of status vary together? Cross-cultural research by Martin Whyte suggests that they do not. For each sample society in his study, Whyte rated 52 items that might be used to define the relative status of the sexes. These items included such things as which sex can inherit property, whose authority is final in disciplining unmarried children, and whether the gods in the society are male, female, or both. The results of the study indicate that very few of these items are related. Therefore, Whyte concluded, we cannot talk about status as a single concept. Rather, it seems more appropriate to talk about the relative status of women in different spheres of life.[56]

Even though Whyte found no necessary connection between one aspect of status and another, he decided to ask whether some of the theories correctly predict why some societies have many, as opposed to few, areas in which the status of women is high. Or, why is there less or more gender stratification? Let us turn first to the ideas *not* supported by the

available cross-cultural evidence. Contrary to popular belief, the idea that generally high status stems from a greater caloric contribution to primary subsistence activities is not supported.[57] For example, women seem to have higher status the more a society depends upon hunting, but women do little of the primary subsistence work in hunting societies. And it is commonly thought that warfare should bolster male status, but there is no consistent evidence that a high frequency of warfare generally lowers women's status in different spheres of life.[58]

Perspectives on Gender

Women's Electoral Success on the Northwest Coast

Political life has changed dramatically since first contact with Europeans for most Native American groups, including the Coast Salish of western Washington State and British Columbia. With impetus from the U.S. and Canadian governments, each of the recognized Coast Salish communities now has an elected council. But who is getting elected? Even though women did not have much of a role in traditional politics, now the Coast Salish groups are electing a lot of women. From the 1960s to the 1980s, women held over 40 percent of the council seats in the 12 Washington State groups, and in the 1990s, women held 28 percent of the seats in the 50 British Columbian groups. The proportion of women on the councils varies from 6 percent among the Tulalip to 62 percent among the Stillaguamish. What accounts for the women's electoral success? And why does that success vary from one group to another, even though the groups are closely related culturally?

According to Bruce Miller, who did a comparative study of women's electoral success in Coast Salish communities, women may generally have more of a political role now because new economic opportunities in the service and technical sectors allow them to contribute more to the household economy. But why do women win proportionately more council seats in some communities than in others? Miller found that women win proportionately more seats in communities with less income, the least income derived from fishing, and the smallest populations. Why should lower household income predict more electoral success for women? Miller suggests that it is not so much the amount of income but rather the degree to which women (compared with men) contribute to household income. In groups with economic difficulties, the jobs women are able to get play a vital role in the household. Federally funded programs such as the War on Poverty helped women to acquire technical skills and jobs. Simultaneously, many men in some communities lost their jobs in logging and agriculture.

Women as well as men serve on political councils in many Coast Salish communities. Here, we see a swearing-in ceremony for the Special Chiefs' Council in Sardis, British Columbia.

But a high dependence on fishing income seems to favor men politically. Families that operate vessels with a large drawstring net to catch fish at sea can make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Men predominantly do such fishing, and where there is such lucrative fishing, the successful men dominate the councils. Even though women may have jobs too, their income is not as great as the successful fisherman's.

Why should women be more successful politically in smaller communities? Miller suggests that women have a better chance to be known personally when the community is small, even though working outside the home in technical or service jobs cuts down on the time women can devote to tribal ceremonials and other public events.

Does female income relative to male and community size help explain the relative political success of women elsewhere? We do not know yet, but subsequent research may help us find out.

Source: B. G. Miller 1992, 1994.

What does predict higher status for women in many areas of life? Although the results are not strong, there is some support in Whyte's study for the theory that women have somewhat higher status where kin groups and marital residence are organized around women. (We discuss these features of society more fully in the chapter on marital residence and kinship.) The Iroquois are a good example. Even though Iroquois women could not hold formal political office, they had considerable authority within and beyond the household. Related women lived together in longhouses with husbands who belonged to other kin groups. In the longhouse, the women's authority was clear, and they could ask objectionable men to leave. The women controlled the allocation of the food they produced. Allocation could influence the timing of war parties, because men could not undertake a raid without provisions. Women were involved in the selection of religious leaders, half of whom were women. Even in politics, although women could not speak or serve on the council, they largely controlled the selection of councilmen and could institute impeachment proceedings against those to whom they objected.[59]

In pre-industrial societies, women have generally lower status in societies with more political hierarchy.[60] Lower status for women is also associated with other indicators of cultural complexity—social stratification, plow-and-irrigation agriculture, large settlements, private property, and craft specialization. Only women's informal influence increases with cultural complexity. But informal influence may simply reflect a lack of *real* influence.[61] Why cultural complexity is associated with women having less authority in the home, less control over property, and more restricted sexual lives in pre-industrial societies is not yet understood. However, the relationship between cultural complexity and gender equality appears to be reversed in industrial and post-industrial societies. Judging by a comparative study of gender attitudes in 61 countries, it seems that countries that rely on agriculture, such as Nigeria and Peru, have the least favorable attitudes toward gender equality; industrial societies, such as Russia and Taiwan, have moderately favorable attitudes; and post-industrial societies, such as Sweden and the United States, have the most favorable attitudes toward gender equality.[62] One critical difference that may explain this reversal is the role that formal education plays in industrial and post-industrial societies. Education almost always increases status, and the more girls and young women are educated, the greater the likelihood that their status will increase. Furthermore, although the mechanisms are not well understood, education usually results in lowered fertility, which perhaps frees women to pursue other interests. As we discussed earlier, one study among the Kayapo found that women with more children are considered less influential.[63]

Western colonialism appears to have been generally detrimental to women's status. Although the relative status of men and women may not have been equal before the Europeans arrived, colonial influences seem generally to have undermined the position of women. There are many examples of Europeans restructuring landownership around men and teaching men modern farming techniques, even in places where women were usually the farmers. In addition, men more often than women could earn cash through wage labor or through sales of goods (such as furs) to Europeans.[64] From these historical lessons and from recent developments, we are beginning to understand some of the conditions that enhance or decrease women's status. If we can understand which of these conditions are most important, societies that want to may be able to reduce gender inequality.[65]

9.7 Discuss gender differences in personality.

Personality Differences

Much of the research on gender differences in personality has taken place in the United States and other Western countries where psychology is a major field of study. Although such studies are informative, they do not tell us whether the observed differences hold true in cultures very different from our own. Fortunately, we now have systematic observational studies for various non-Western societies. These studies recorded the minute details of behavior of substantial numbers of males and females. Most of the studies have observed children in different cultural settings. Any conclusions about female-male differences in aggressiveness, for example, are based on actual counts of the number of times a particular individual tried to hurt or injure another person during a given amount of observation time. Almost all of these differences are a matter of degree, not a matter of a behavior being present or absent in females or males.

Applied Anthropology

Economic Development and Women's Status

Based on the writings of Ester Boserup and subsequent scholarship on women in development, the prevailing opinion was that development usually made things worse for women. Development agents commonly targeted men for learning new technology and how to produce crops for sale. Today, women in developing countries are still largely left out and women still face difficulties, but recent research has documented how women often find creative ways to participate in commercial enterprises.

Some of the creative strategies women use in Kenya to get around their structural disadvantages include buying or renting land with their proceeds, "pooling" small pieces of land to meet minimum requirements for commercial growers, joining women's rotating credit associations, and looking to the private sector for training and materials for contract agriculture.

Women's scale of production can range from raising a few extra pigs for sale in southwestern China to more complex activities, such as contract farming for crop exports in Kenya, or market trading in Ghana.

In contrast to men nearly every where in developing countries, women use the money from their commercial enterprises to purchase food and household goods and to educate their children. If their incomes or savings grow, they may pay for large appliances, furniture, and farm machinery and vehicles. Most of the recent studies suggest that bringing money into the household translates into lasting changes in the status of women, including increased educational opportunities, greater say in household decisions, and higher social status in the community.

Microfinance programs for small business have helped women in developing countries to build status and independence.

Some opportunities for women also open up when men move into other domains. For example, among the Ashanti of Ghana, many men moved out of market trading to take advantage of more lucrative cocoa production. Women had long been traders along with men, but with the departure of men, women took over many of men's former market niches and began to engage in longer-distance trade. In Kenya, male migration has increased the number of women who manage the farm and head households.

Such examples of economic empowerment among women in agricultural societies are encouraging, even though farming keeps them close to home and away from other, more public opportunities. How do women fare in industrial societies, where only a small proportion of people engage in farming? According to a survey of 61 countries, gender equality is more favored in industrializing countries than in agricultural societies. With industrialization, infant and child mortality decline, lessening the pressure on women to reproduce. Perhaps this frees them to pursue education and work outside the home. Post-industrial countries, with even lower fertility rates, are even more accepting of gender equality. As women learn more and get out in the world more, gender inequality appears to decline.

Sources: Anita Spring 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; Bossen 2000; G. Clark 2000; Doyle 2005.

Aggression Which differences in personality are suggested by these systematic studies? The most consistent difference is in the area of aggression. Boys try to hurt others more frequently than girls do. In the Six Cultures project, an extensive comparative study of children's behavior, this difference was statistically significant as early as 3 to 6 years of age.[66] Six different research teams observed children's behavior in Kenya (among the Gusii), Mexico, India, the Philippines, Okinawa, and the United States. A more recent cross-cultural comparison of four other cultures (the Logoli of Kenya, Nepal, Belize, and American Samoa) supports the finding that boys are generally more aggressive.[67] Studies in

Cross-culturally, girls more often play in small, intimate groups, boys in larger groups with more interpersonal distance.

the United States are consistent with the cross-cultural findings as well: In a large number of observational and experimental studies, boys exhibited more aggression than girls.[68]

Other female-male differences have turned up with considerable consistency, but we have to be cautious in accepting them, either because they have not been documented as well or because there are more exceptions. There seems to be a tendency for girls to exhibit more responsible behavior, including nurturance (trying to help others). Girls seem more likely to conform to adult wishes and commands. Boys try more often to exert dominance over others to get their own way. In play, boys and girls show a preference for their own gender. Boys seem to play in large groups, girls in small ones. And boys seem to maintain more personal distance between each other than girls do.[69]

If we assume that these differences are consistent across cultures, how can we explain them? Many writers and researchers believe that because certain female-male differences are so consistent, they are probably rooted in the biological differences between the two sexes. Aggression is one of the traits most often attributed to biology, particularly because gender difference in this behavior appears so early in life.[70] But an alternative argument is that societies bring up boys and girls differently because they almost universally require adult males and females to perform different types of roles. If most societies expect adult males to be warriors or to be prepared to be warriors, shouldn't we expect most societies to encourage or idealize aggression in males? And if females are almost always the caretakers of infants, shouldn't we also expect societies generally to encourage nurturing behaviors in females?

Researchers tend to adopt either the biological or the socialization view, but it is possible that both kinds of causes are important in the development of gender differences. For example, parents might turn a slight biological difference into a large gender difference by maximizing that difference in the way they socialize boys versus girls.

It is difficult for researchers to distinguish the influence of genes and other biological conditions from the influence of socialization. As we discussed in the beginning of this chapter, we have research indicating that parents treat boy and girl infants differently as early as birth.[71] In spite of the fact that objective observers can see no major "personality" differences between girl and boy infants, parents often claim to.[72] But parents may unconsciously want to see differences and may therefore produce them in socialization. Even early differences could be learned, therefore, rather than resulting from biological differences. Remember, too, that researchers cannot do experiments with people; for example, parents' behavior cannot be manipulated to find out what would happen if boys and girls were treated in exactly the same ways.

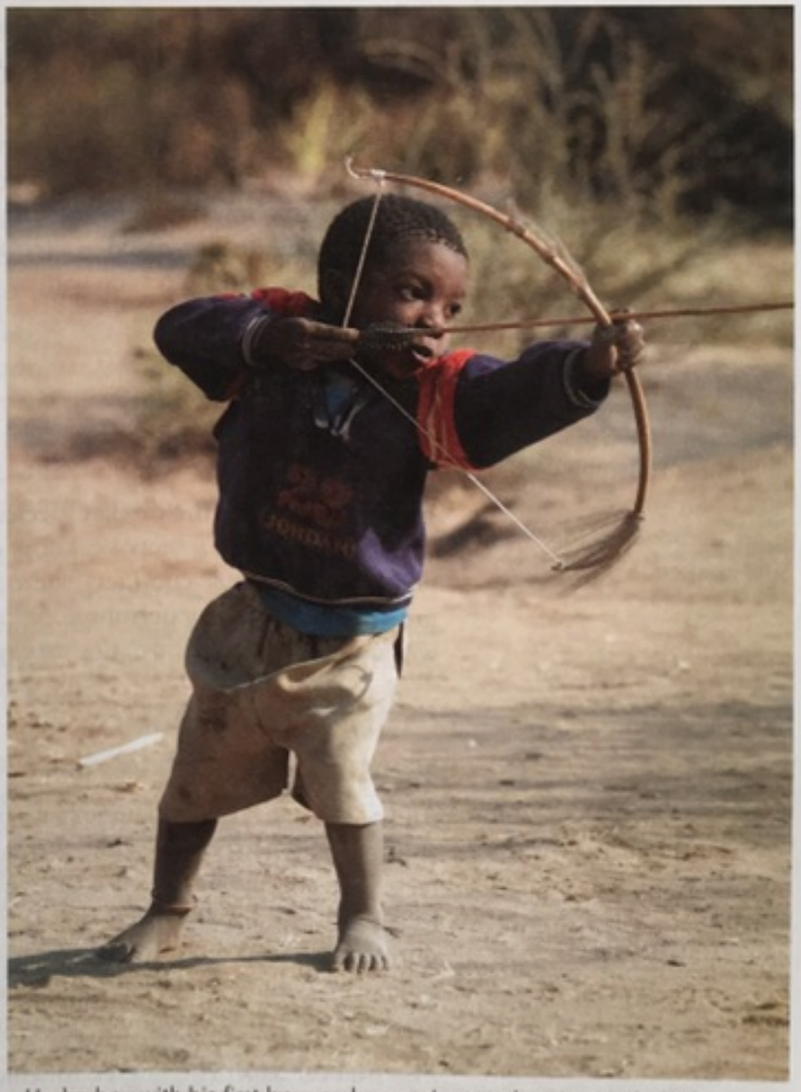
However, there is considerable experimental research on aggression in nonhuman animals. These experiments suggest that the hormone androgen is partly responsible for higher levels of aggression. For example, in some experiments, females injected with androgen at about the time the sexual organs develop (before or shortly after birth) behave more aggressively when they are older than do females without the hormone.

These results may or may not apply to humans, of course, but some researchers have investigated human females who were "androgenized" in the womb because of drugs given to their mothers to prevent miscarriage. By and large, the results of these studies are similar to the experimental studies—androgenized human females show similar patterns of higher aggression.[73] Some scholars take these results to indicate that biological differences between males and females are responsible for the male-female difference in aggression;[74] others suggest that even these results are not conclusive because females who get more androgen show generally disturbed metabolic systems, and general metabolic disturbance may itself increase aggressiveness. Furthermore, androgen-injected females may look more like males because they develop male-like genitals; therefore, they may be treated like males.[75] Even the degree of aggression in males that can be attributed to androgens—and specifically, testosterone—is variable, it seems. Studies in endocrinology suggest that high testosterone levels in themselves do not cause men to be more aggressive. Rather, it appears that aggression results when testosterone surges in response to a distress signal of a sort sent by the amygdala, which is a part of the brain that communicates with the emotional center of the brain, the hypothalamus. In other words, if a male is otherwise in a mellow mood, a surge of testosterone is not likely to incite him to violence.[76]

Is there any cross-cultural evidence that socialization differences may account for differences in aggression? Although a survey of ethnographers' reports on 101 societies does show that more societies encourage aggression in boys than in girls, most societies show no difference in aggression training.[77] The few societies that do show differences in aggression training can hardly account for the widespread sex differences in actual aggressiveness. But the survey does not necessarily mean that there are no consistent differences in aggression training for boys and girls. All it shows is that there are no *obvious* differences. For all we know, the learning of aggression and other "masculine" traits by boys could be produced by subtle types of socialization.

One possible type of subtle socialization that could create gender differences in behavior is the chores children are assigned. It is possible that little boys and girls learn to behave differently because their parents ask them to do different kinds of work. Beatrice and John Whiting reported from the Six Cultures project that in societies where children were asked to do a great deal of work, they generally showed more responsible and nurturant behavior. Girls, who are almost always asked to do more work than boys, may be more responsible and nurturant for this reason alone.[78] If this reasoning is correct, we should find that boys asked to do girls' work would behave more like girls.

A study of Luo children in Kenya by Carol Ember supports this view.[79] Girls were usually asked to babysit, cook, clean house, and fetch water and firewood. Boys were usually asked to do very little because boys' traditional work was herding cattle, and most families in the community studied had few cattle. But for some reason, more boys than girls had been born, and many mothers without girls at home asked their sons to do girls' chores. Systematic behavior observations showed that much of the behavior of the boys who did girls' work was intermediary between the behavior of other boys and the behavior of girls. The boys who did girls' work were more like girls in that they were less aggressive, less domineering, and more responsible than other boys, even when they



Hadza boy with his first bow and arrow. In most hunting-gathering societies, boys learn hunting skill quite early.

weren't working. So it is possible that task assignment has an important influence on how boys and girls learn to behave.

Research in behavioral biology lends support to another kind of social effect. It seems that social conditioning may be as important as—if not more important than— testosterone in predicting aggression in males. A male who is deprived of testosterone but had been conditioned previously to be aggressive will continue to be so. On the other hand, a formerly nonviolent male who is given extra testosterone is not likely to be more aggressive in the face of frustration.[80]

As we noted, an observed difference in aggression does not mean that males are aggressive and females are not. Perhaps because males are generally more aggressive, female aggression has been studied less often. For that reason, Victoria Burbank focused on female aggression in an Australian aborigine community she calls Mangrove. During her 18 months there, Burbank observed some act of aggression almost every other day. Consistent with the cross-cultural evidence, men initiated aggression more often than women, but women were initiators about 43 percent of the time. The women of Mangrove engaged in almost all the same kinds of aggression as men did, including fighting, except that their aggression tended not to be as lethal as male violence. Men most often used lethal weapons; when women fought with weapons, they mostly used sticks, not spears, guns, or knives. Burbank points out that, in contrast to Western cultures, female aggression is not viewed as unnatural or deviant but, rather, as a natural expression of anger.[81]

Dependence One common mistaken belief is that girls are more dependent than boys. The results obtained by the Six Cultures project cast doubt on this notion.[82] First, girls are no more likely to show "dependent" behavior than boys if we think of dependency as seeking help or emotional reassurance from others. To be sure, the results do indicate that boys and girls have somewhat different styles of dependency. Girls more often seek help and contact, whereas boys more often seek attention and approval.

Sociability and Passivity The Six Cultures results showed no reliable differences in sociability, or seeking and offering friendship, between the sexes. Of course, boys and girls may be sociable in different ways, because boys generally play in larger groups than girls. As for the supposed passivity of girls, the evidence is also not particularly convincing. Girls in the Six Cultures project did not consistently withdraw from aggressive attacks or comply with unreasonable demands. The only thing that emerged as a female-male difference was that older girls were less likely than boys to respond to aggression with aggression. But this finding may not reflect passivity as much as the fact that girls are less aggressive than boys, which we already knew.

9.8 Explain variability in sexual behavior and attitudes between different cultures.

Sexuality

In view of the way the human species reproduces, it is not surprising that sexuality is part of our nature. But no society we know of leaves sexuality to nature; all have at least some rules governing "proper" conduct. There is much variation from one society to another in the degree of sexual activity permitted or encouraged before marriage, outside marriage, and even within marriage. And societies vary markedly in their tolerance of nonheterosexual sexuality.

Cultural Regulations of Sexuality: Permissiveness Versus Restrictiveness

All societies seek to regulate sexual activity to some degree, and there is a lot of variation cross-culturally. Some societies allow premarital sex; others forbid it. The same is true for extramarital sex. In addition, a society's degree of restrictiveness is not always consistent throughout the life span or for all aspects of sex. For example, a number of societies ease sexual restrictions during adolescence but impose more restrictions for adults.[83] Then, too, societies change over time. The United States has traditionally been restrictive, but until recently—before the emergence of the AIDS epidemic—more permissive attitudes had been gaining acceptance.

Premarital Sex The degree to which sex before marriage is approved or disapproved of varies greatly from society to society. The Trobriand Islanders, for example, approved of and encouraged premarital sex, seeing it as an important preparation for marriage. Both girls

and boys were given complete instruction in all forms of sexual expression at the onset of puberty and were allowed plenty of premarital opportunity for intimacy. Some societies not only allow premarital sex on a casual basis but specifically encourage trial marriages between adolescents. Among the Ila-speaking peoples of central Africa, at harvest time, girls were given houses of their own and could play at being wife with the boys of their choice.[84]

Premarital sex was discouraged in many other societies. For example, among the Tepoztlan Indians of Mexico, a girl's life became "crabbed, cribbed, confined" from the time of her first menstruation. She was not to speak to or encourage boys in the least way. To do so would be to court disgrace, to show herself to be crazy. The responsibility of guarding the chastity and reputation of one or more daughters of marriageable age was often a burden for the mother. One mother said she wished that her 15-year-old daughter would marry soon because it was inconvenient to "spy" on her all the time.[85] In many Arabic societies, a girl's premarital chastity was tested after her marriage. After the wedding night, blood-stained sheets were displayed as proof of the bride's virginity.

Cultures do not remain the same, however; attitudes and practices can change markedly over time, as they have in the United States and in many European countries. In the past, sex was generally delayed until after marriage in Western societies; in the 1990s, most Americans, like their counterparts in Europe, accepted or even approved of premarital sex.[86]

Sex in Marriage Not surprisingly, there are many common features in the sexual relations of married couples, but there is also considerable cross-cultural variation. In most societies, some form of face-to-face sexual intercourse or coitus is the usual pattern, most preferring the woman on her back and the man on top. Couples in most cultures prefer privacy, which is easier in societies with single-family dwellings or separate rooms. But privacy is difficult to attain in societies that have unpartitioned and multifamily dwellings. The Siriono of Bolivia, for example, slept in hammocks 10 feet apart, and a house could contain as many as 50 hammocks. Not surprisingly, couples in such societies have preferred to have sex outdoors in a secluded location.[87]

Night is often preferred for sex, but some cultures have opted specifically for day. For example, the Chenchu of India believed that a child conceived at night might be born blind. In some societies, couples engage in sex quickly with little or no foreplay; in others, foreplay may take hours.[88] Attitudes toward marital sex and the frequency of it vary widely from culture to culture. In one cross-cultural survey, frequent marital sex is generally viewed as a good thing, but in 9 percent of the societies studied, frequent sex is viewed as undesirable and a cause of weakness, illness, and sometimes death.[89] People in most societies abstain from intercourse during menstruation, during at least part of pregnancy, and for a period after childbirth. Some societies prohibit sexual relations before certain activities, such as hunting, fighting, planting, brewing, and iron smelting. Our own society is among the most lenient regarding restrictions on intercourse within marriage, imposing only rather loose (if any) restraints during mourning, menstruation, and pregnancy.[90]

Extramarital Sex Extramarital sex is not uncommon in many societies. In about 69 percent of the world's societies, men have extramarital sex more than occasionally, as do women in about 57 percent of societies. The frequency of such sexual activity is higher than we might expect, given that only a slight majority of societies admit that they allow extramarital sex for men, and only 11 percent of societies acknowledge allowing it for women.[91]

There is quite a difference, then, between the restrictive code and actual practice of many societies. The Navajo of the 1940s were said to forbid adultery, but young married men under the age of 30 had about a quarter of their heterosexual contacts with women other than their wives.[92] And although people in the United States in the 1970s almost overwhelmingly rejected extramarital sex, 41 percent of married men and about 18 percent of married women had had extramarital sex. In the 1990s, with the onset of the AIDS epidemic, proportionately more men and women reported that they had been faithful to their spouses.[93] Cross-culturally, most societies also have a double standard with regard to men and women, with restrictions on women being considerably greater.[94] A substantial number of societies openly accept extramarital relationships. The Chukchee of Siberia, who often traveled long distances, allowed a married man to engage in sex with his host's wife, with the understanding that he would offer the same hospitality when the host visited him.[95]

Although a society may allow extramarital sex, a recent cross-cultural study of individual reactions to extramarital sex finds that men and women try a variety of strategies to curtail such sex. Men are much more likely than women to resort to physical violence against their wives; women are more likely to distance themselves from their husbands. Gossip may be employed to shame the relationship, and a higher authority may be asked to intervene in more complex societies. Researchers conclude that married women and men universally consider extramarital sex inappropriate, even in societies that occasionally permit it.[96]

Homosexuality When most people, including most researchers, discuss homosexuality, they usually refer to sex between males or sex between females. The biological male-female dichotomy corresponds to the gender male-female dichotomy in Western societies, but as we have seen earlier in this chapter, some other societies do not have the same gender concepts. The meaning of homosexuality, therefore, may differ according to the society. The Navajo of the American Southwest, for example, traditionally recognized four genders. Only relationships between people of the same gender would be considered homosexual, and they considered such relationships inappropriate.[97] Biologically speaking, such cross-gender relationships would be considered homosexual in the Western view, and most of the research to date has adopted this view, labeling sexual relations between biologically males or females as homosexuality.

The range in the world's societies of permissiveness or restrictiveness toward homosexual relations is as great as that for any other kind of sexual activity. Among the Lepcha of the Himalayas, a man was believed to become homosexual if he ate the flesh of an uncastrated pig. At the same time, the Lepcha denied that homosexual behavior existed among them, and they viewed it with disgust.[98] Perhaps because many societies deny that homosexuality exists, little is known about homosexual practices in the restrictive societies. Among the permissive ones, there is variation in the type and pervasiveness of homosexuality. In some societies, homosexuality is accepted but limited to certain times and certain individuals. For example, among the Papago of the southwestern United States, there were "nights of saturnalia" in which homosexual tendencies could be expressed. The Papago also had many male transvestites who wore women's clothing, did women's chores, and, if not married, could be visited by men.[99] A woman did not have the same freedom of expression. She could participate in the saturnalia feasts, but only with her husband's permission, and female transvestites were nonexistent.

Backstage beauty preparations for hijra and gay people in Chennai, India

Homosexuality occurs even more widely in other societies. The Berber-speaking Siwans of North Africa expected all males to engage in homosexual relations. In fact, fathers made arrangements for their unmarried sons to be given to an older man in a homosexual arrangement. Siwan custom limited a man to one boy. Such arrangements were made openly until 1909, when fear of the Egyptian government made them a secret matter. Almost all Siwan men were reported to have engaged in a homosexual relationship as boys; later, when they were between 16 and 20, they married girls.[100] Such prescribed homosexual relationships between people of different ages are a common form of homosexuality.[101] Among the most extremely pro-homosexual societies, the Etoro of New Guinea preferred homosexuality to heterosexuality. Heterosexuality was prohibited as many as 260 days a year and was forbidden in or near the house and gardens. Male homosexuality, on the other hand, was not prohibited at any time and was believed to make crops flourish and boys become strong.[102] Even among the Etoro, however, men were expected to marry women after a certain age.[103]

Only recently have researchers paid much attention to erotic relationships between females. Although early studies found relatively few societies with female-female sexual relationships, Evelyn Blackwood located reports of 95 societies with such practices, suggesting that it is more common than previously thought.[104] As with male homosexuality, some societies institutionalize same-sex sexual relationships—the Kaguru of Tanzania have female homosexual relationships between older and younger women as part of their initiation ceremonies, reminiscent of the male-male "mentor" relationships in ancient Greece.

Cross-culturally, it is extremely unusual to find "gays" or exclusive male or female homosexuals. In most societies, males and females are expected to marry, and homosexuality, if tolerated or approved, either occurs as a phase in one's life or occurs along with heterosexuality.[105]

Reasons for Sexual Restrictiveness

Before we deal with the question of why some societies are more restrictive than others, we must first ask whether all forms of restrictiveness go together. The research to date suggests that societies that are restrictive with regard to one aspect of heterosexual sex tend to be restrictive with regard to other aspects. Thus, societies that frown on sexual expression by young children also punish premarital and extramarital sex.[106] Furthermore, such societies tend to insist on modesty in clothing and are constrained in their talk about sex.[107] But societies that are generally restrictive about heterosexuality are not necessarily restrictive about homosexuality. For instance, societies restrictive about premarital sex are neither more nor less likely to restrict homosexuality. The situation is somewhat different regarding extramarital sex. Societies in which male homosexuality is prevalent tend to disapprove of males having extramarital heterosexual relationships.[108] If we are going to explain restrictiveness, then, it appears we have to consider heterosexual and homosexual restrictiveness separately.

Let us consider homosexual restrictiveness first. One study finds that societies that forbid abortion and infanticide for married women (most societies permit these practices for illegitimate births) are likely to be intolerant of male homosexuality.[109] This and other findings are consistent with the point of view that homosexuality is less tolerated in societies that would like to increase their population. Such societies may be intolerant of all kinds of behaviors that minimize population growth. Homosexuality would have this effect if we assume that a higher frequency of homosexual relations is associated with a lower frequency of heterosexual relations. The less frequently heterosexual relations occur, the lower the number of conceptions there might be. Another indication that intolerance may be related to a desire for population growth is that societies with famines and severe food shortages are more likely to allow homosexuality. Famines and food shortages suggest population pressure on resources; under these conditions, homosexuality and other practices that minimize population growth may be tolerated or even encouraged.[110]

Population pressure may also explain why our own society has become somewhat more tolerant of homosexuality recently. Of course, population pressure does not explain why certain individuals become homosexual or why most individuals in some societies engage in such behavior, but it might explain why some societies view such behavior more or less permissively.

Let us now turn to heterosexual behavior. What kinds of societies are more permissive than others? Although we do not yet understand the reasons, we do know that greater restrictiveness toward premarital sex tends to occur in more complex societies—societies that have hierarchies of political officials, part-time or full-time craft specialists, cities and towns, and class stratification.[111] It may be that, as social inequality increases, parents become more concerned with preventing their children from marrying "beneath them." Permissiveness toward premarital sexual relationships might lead a person to become attached to someone not considered a desirable marriage partner. Even worse, from the family's point of view, an "unsuitable" sexual liaison might result in a pregnancy that could make it impossible for a girl to marry "well." Controlling mating, then, may be a way of trying to control property. Consistent with this view is the finding that virginity is emphasized in rank and stratified societies, in which families are likely to exchange goods and money in the course of arranging marriages.[112]

The biological fact that humans depend on sexual reproduction does not by itself help explain why females and males differ in so many ways across cultures or why societies vary in the way they handle male and female roles. We are only beginning to investigate these questions. When we eventually understand more about how and why females and males differ in gender roles, personality, and sexuality, we may be better able to decide how much we want the biology of sex to shape our lives.

Summary and Review

Gender Concepts

9.1 Describe variation in gender concepts

- The division into just two genders—male/female—is very common cross-culturally, but a strict dichotomy is far from universal.
- Some cultures have additional gender designations besides male and female.

What are some examples of varying gender concepts?

Physique and Physiology

9.2 Identify differences in physique and physiology between males and females.

- Humans are sexually dimorphic: Females have proportionately wider pelvises and a larger proportion of fat; males typically are taller and have heavier skeletons, a larger proportion of muscle, greater grip strength, proportionately larger hearts and lungs, and more aerobic capacity.
- Females achieve their ultimate height shortly after puberty, but boys continue to grow for years after puberty. Natural selection may have favored earlier cessation of female growth so the nutritional needs of a fetus would not compete with a growing mother's needs.
- Gender differences may be the result of both culture and genes.

How might gender differences result from both culture and genes?

Gender Roles

9.3 Explain differences in gender roles.

- Many societies divide up work in similar ways. Four theories—strength theory, compatibility-with-child-care theory, economy-of-effort theory, and expendability theory—try to explain why females and males generally do different work, but each has theoretical weaknesses.
- Strength theory says that males generally possess greater strength and a superior capacity to mobilize their strength in quick bursts of energy; however, not all male activities require strength, and women do hunt in some societies.
- The compatibility-with-child-care theory suggests that women make child care a priority and fit in other tasks but does not explain why men usually prepare soil for planting and make wood, bone,

horn, and shell objects, tasks that can probably be stopped to tend to a child and no more dangerous than cooking.

- The economy-of-effort interpretation suggests that it would be advantageous for one gender to perform tasks that are related in terms of knowledge and training and tasks that are physically located near each other.
- The expendability theory is the idea that men will tend to do the dangerous work in a society because the loss of men is not as great a disadvantage reproductively as the loss of women. However, it does not explain why men would put themselves in danger.
- As societies change, gender roles tend to change but still remain divided in some way.

What are some of the near-universals and differences in gender roles cross-culturally? Discuss domestic, productive, and political roles.

Relative Contributions to Work: Who Works More?

9.4 Analyze relative gender differences in term of contributions to work.

- Most contemporary societies typically equate "work" with earning money, but that view is relatively recent to human history.
- Anthropologists may skew research about division of labor by focusing more on gathering, hunting, fishing, herding, and farming than on food preparation and storage and, in so doing, distort the importance of each gender's contributions.
- In horticultural and intensive agricultural societies, studies so far suggest that women typically work more total hours per day than men.
- Usually both women and men contribute a good deal toward primary food-getting activities, but men usually contribute more in most societies. The type of agriculture may help explain some of the variation.
- Cross-cultural studies suggest that, when women contribute a lot to primary food-getting activities, infants are fed solid foods earlier, enabling others to feed them; girls are likely to be industrious, probably to help their mothers; and female babies are more valued.

What might explain why men and women do relatively more work?

Political Leadership and Warfare

9.5 Discuss gender differences in terms of political leadership and warfare cross-culturally.

- In almost every known society, men tend to lead in political arenas, possibly because men's role in warfare may give them the edge in political leadership and because men spend more time in the outside world than do women.
- Males almost universally dominate in warfare, perhaps because warfare requires strength and quick bursts of energy, combat is not compatible with child care, and women's fertility is more important to a population than their usefulness as warriors.

What theories might support the findings about gender differences in political leadership and warfare?

The Relative Status of Women

9.6 Analyze relative status among women cross-culturally.

- Theories suggest that women will have higher status when: (1) women contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities; (2) where residence is organized around women; (3) where warfare is unimportant; and (4) where political hierarchies are less centralized.
- The idea that generally high status for women stems from greater caloric contribution to primary subsistence activities is not supported by research evidence. Nor is generally higher status for men associated with more warfare.
- The idea of status has multiple dimensions that are not always linked. Thus, research needs to look at women's status in various spheres of life, why some societies have many areas in which women's status is high and others have few, or why there is less or more gender stratification.
- Education almost always increases status, and the more girls and young women are educated, the greater the likelihood that their status will increase.

How might the relative status of women and men be measured? What are some of the findings on cross-cultural variations in status by gender?

Personality Differences

9.7 Discuss gender differences in personality.

- Observed differences between male and female personalities in Western and non-Western countries are a matter of degree, not a matter of a behavior being present or absent.
- Aggression is the most consistent personality difference: Boys try to hurt others more often than girls do. This difference appears early, so it may have biological causes, possibly hormonal. But societies may also raise boys and girls differently from very early ages, so nature and nurture are hard to separate.
- Cross-culturally, girls are no more likely to show "dependent" behavior than boys if dependency is seen as seeking help or emotional reassurance from others; however, studies show that boys and girls have somewhat different styles of dependency.
- Cross-culturally, studies show no reliable differences in levels of sociability between the sexes, although male and female styles of sociability may differ.
- Cross-culturally, studies do not confirm that girls are more passive than boys, but they do show that older girls were less likely than boys to respond to aggression with aggression.

? What are some of the cross-cultural findings about gender differences in personality?

Sexuality

9.8 Explain variability in sexual behavior and attitudes between different cultures.

- All societies have rules governing "proper" sexual conduct, but they vary. In addition, a society's degree of restrictiveness is not always consistent throughout the life span or for all aspects of sex. Approval or disapproval of premarital sex varies greatly cross-culturally.
- Sexual attitudes and practices can change markedly over time in societies.
- Attitudes toward marital sex and its frequency and location vary widely cross-culturally. The restrictive codes for extramarital sex in many societies vary greatly from actual practice.
- Cross-culturally, the meaning of homosexuality may differ, and acceptance or limitations vary greatly. In most societies, males and females are expected to marry, and homosexuality, if tolerated or approved, occurs either as a phase in one's life or along with heterosexuality.
- Current research suggests that societies that are restrictive with regard to heterosexual sex may not be restrictive about homosexuality. Homosexuality may be tolerated or encouraged in societies that minimize population growth.
- Greater restrictiveness toward premarital sex tends to occur in more complex societies—societies that have hierarchies of political officials, part-time or full-time craft specialists, cities and towns, and class stratification.

? What may explain variability in sexual behavior and attitudes between different cultures?

Think on it

1. Would you expect female-male differences in personality to disappear in a society with complete **gender equality** in the workplace?
2. Under what circumstances would you expect male-female differences in **athletic performance** to disappear?
3. What conditions may make the **election** of a female head of state most likely?