


The Meanings of Difference

Chapter 4



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Chapter Outline

The Politics of Difference and Similarity

Gendering Cognition: “Girls Can’t Do Math”

Gendering Emotion: “Boys Don’t Cry”

Making a Difference

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Politics of DIFFERENCE and SIMILARITY

Similarities tradition: idea that women and men are very much alike in intelligence, personality, abilities, and goals

Differences tradition: idea that there are fundamental differences between women and men that should be recognized and honored

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Defining Differences and Similarities

Mean difference: mathematical average of differences

Variability: range or spread of scores

Statistically significant: unlikely to have occurred by random chance

Confounding: effects of two or more variables are mixed, making it impossible to determine which variable is causing experimental effects

- Source of bias in gender-difference research

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MEASURING DIFFERENCES

Meta-analysis: using quantitative methods to summarize results of multiple research studies conducted by different people at different times (Hedges and Becker, 1986)

Moderator variable: variable that interacts with another variable to change its effect

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Interpreting Results: Values and Ideology in Research

Values and beliefs related to gender have affected research throughout the history of science (Gould, 1981; Harding, 1986)

- The first systematic empirical research on women conducted by scientists of the late nineteenth century took women's inferiority as a given
 - Was aimed at uncovering the biological determinants of women's inferiority

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Female Brain: Different, Inferior, and Deficient

Early researchers asserted that the inferiority of women and people of color was due to their smaller brains

Variability hypothesis: developed to present men as more variable than women

- Although men and women may be similar on average, there are more men at the extremes of human behavior
- Variability was viewed as an advantageous characteristic that enabled species to evolve adaptively

Some of the first generation of women who became psychologists worked to dispute the claims that women were inferior in mental ability

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Gendering Cognition: “Girls Can’t Do Math”

Boys score higher only on *advanced* mathematical performance

Girls get better math grades overall

- It is claimed that girls get their higher grades by being quiet and neat, following directions, and trying hard to please their teachers




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Girls’ higher grades are linked not only to their ability to refrain from disruptive behavior in class but also to their drive for mastery (Kenney-Benson et al., 2006)

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What Factors Influence Math Performance?

Many interacting factors are responsible for gender difference in math

- Biological perspectives
- Math as a male domain, related to stereotypes
- Gender bias in the classroom
- Stereotype threat

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Social Implications of Gendered Cognition

Society needs to pay more attention to the intellectual development of girls by providing them with toys that are not sex stereotyped

Emphasis on standardized tests may be misplaced

- Goal of testing is to predict performance, but tests underpredict women’s performance
- **Female underprediction effect:** although women score lower than men on standardized tests, they receive higher grades in college, which compromises women’s right to equal education

Beliefs about women’s alleged inability to do mathematical and scientific thinking perpetuate their exclusion from prestigious and rewarding careers in science and engineering

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Gendering Emotion: “Boys Don’t Cry”




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Emotion Stereotypes

- Emotions have traditionally been gender-marked or gender-typed as female or male (Becker et al., 2007)
- Women are stereotyped as the emotional sex, but this depends on the peculiar definition of emotion
- Emotional displays by men are often not labeled as emotionality (Shields, 2002)
- Women have greater **decoding ability**, which is recognizing emotions expressed by others

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Culture, Ethnicity, and Emotionality

Expressing Emotion

- Emotional **display rules:** cultural guidelines that govern which emotions may be expressed, under what circumstances, and how (Safdar et al., 2009)

Experiencing Emotion

- **Independent self:** each individual is seen as unique, and the task of each individual is to fulfill his or her potential and become an autonomous person
- **Interdependent self:** individuals are connected in a web of relationships, and their task is to maintain connections by fitting in and building reciprocal relationships
 - Gender differences in emotionality are smaller in collectivist cultures compared to individualistic ones
 - Collectivist cultures permit men and women to feel and express a full range of emotions

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EMOTIONALITY and SOCIAL INTERACTION

Learning the Emotion Rules and Gendering Emotion

- Studies show parents more likely to talk about people and emotions with their *daughters* rather than with their *sons*
- Children learn **feeling rules** (Shields, 2002)
 - **Feeling rules:** what it means to experience an emotion, what others expect them to feel, and how they are supposed to recognize emotions in others
 - Cultures differ in their rules for displaying and feeling emotion, but most societies have rules that are gender-linked




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Social Implications of Gendered Emotions

Emotions, Status, and Power

- Expressing emotion is linked to status and power as well as to gender
 - High- and low-status people are perceived differently when expressing the same emotion
 - The right to get angry and show it is one kind of social power
- Emotionality, status, and power are related to the roles and occupations considered to fit women and men




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Emotions and Relationship Conflict

Stereotypes about the emotionally inexpressive male suggest that men need to be coaxed into recognizing and expressing their feelings

- Men are likely to learn that expressing anger is an acceptable and effective means of controlling others
- Emotional inexpressiveness when it comes to positive feelings may serve to preserve status and power differentials that benefit men

Women are stereotypically expected to keep a relationship smooth and conflict-free

- Married women are often expected to be emotion managers and mediators among their family members

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Individual Level: Thinking Critically

- There is much more variability within each sex than between the sexes on cognitive skills, abilities, and personality traits

Interactional Level: Difference and Discrimination

- Emotional displays may be judged differently depending on whether the emotion is coming from a woman or a man
 - Gender-linked difference does not justify group discrimination

Sociocultural Level: Creating Opportunities for Equality

- Educators have created many programs to equalize opportunities for girls and young women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics or S T E M

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Can Similarities and Differences Be Reconciled?

Sociocultural aspects of gender govern access to resources

Traditions also recognize that gender can become internalized

- Similarities tradition encourages a focus on equity for girls and women in family, work, and educational settings
- Differences tradition suggests that women’s characteristics, such as greater emotional connectedness with others, are strengths, not weaknesses

Becoming familiar with both traditions can help address how socially produced gender seems inevitable, natural, and freely chosen

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