

Chapter 2 – Methods and History of Gender Research

Chapter Outline and Lecture Notes

1. Introduction

- a. Recent research often presents conflicting results.
 - i. Weitzman (1985) reported that women's standards of living decreased 73% after divorce, but men's increased by 42%
 - ii. A study with a larger sample (Duncan & Hoffman, 1985) reported that women's standard of living decreased 30% while men's decreased 7%.
- b. The difference in results can be attributed to sample size and methodology.
- c. Understanding the scientific literature on gender requires understanding social science methodologies.

2. The Scientific Method.

- a. Terms used in social science research.
 - i. The scientific method rests on **empiricism**.
 - ii. The information gathered through empiricism (observation) is called **data**.
 - iii. **Facts** are statements made about data.
 - iv. Facts are aggregated in the creation of **theories**, abstract generalizations that provide explanations for facts.
 - v. Scientific theories must be falsifiable.
 - vi. A theory will generate a **hypothesis**, a prediction of a certain outcome.
- b. **Correlational Study**
 - i. A correlational study focuses on the relation between two variables at one point in time.
 - ii. The major problem with correlational studies is that there are a number of explanations for the relation between variables.
 - iii. Correlations vary between -1 and +1.
 - iv. A **positive correlation** is one in which the levels of both variables increase or decrease together.
 - v. A **negative correlation** occurs when the level of one variable increases as the level of the other decreases.

- vi. **Random sampling** assures that each member of the population has an equal chance of being a participant in a study.

c. **Experimental Study**

- i. In an experiment, the investigator manipulates the **independent variable** and observes its effect on the **dependent variable**.
- ii. **Random assignment** means each participant has an equal chance of being assigned to each condition of an experiment.
- iii. Subject variables, such as sex, race or ethnicity are not changeable.
- iv. Sex can be a **stimulus** or **target variable** in an experiment, meaning it is the characteristic of something to which people respond.
- v. One major strength of experimental studies is that they can be used to determine cause and effect relationships.
- vi. **Internal validity** refers to your confidence that you are measuring the true cause of an effect.
- vii. One weakness of experimental studies is that they are often conducted in artificial settings.
- viii. **External validity** refers to the ability to generalize findings to the real world.

d. **Field Experiment**

- i. When experimental methods are taken into the setting where the behavior under investigation naturally occurs, **field experiments** can be conducted.
- ii. Field experiments attempt to maximize both internal and external validity.

e. **Cross-Sectional Versus Longitudinal Designs**

- i. **Cross-sectional studies** occur when the relation between variables is measured at one point in time.
- ii. **Longitudinal studies** occur when measurement is taken at multiple points in time.
- iii. Longitudinal studies help distinguish **age effects** from **cohort effects**.

f. **Meta-Analysis**

- i. A **meta-analysis** quantifies the results of a group of studies.
- ii. Meta-analyses can assess an overall effect in terms of its significance and its magnitude.

3. Difficulties In Conducting Research On Gender

- a. **Experimenter effects** are the ways the person conducting the research can influence the study.
 - i. An experimenter can influence the outcome of a study with the nature of the question asked and the subsequent design of a study.
 - 1) An experimenter's method for choosing participants can influence the outcome of a study.
 - 2) An experimenter can influence the outcome of a study with the variables that are manipulated and measured.
 - ii. An experimenter's method of collecting data can influence the outcome of a study.
 - iii. An experimenter can influence the outcome of the study with the way she or he interprets the data.
 - iv. An experimenter's communication of the findings can influence the impact of a study.
- b. **Participant effects** are the ways that the people in the experiment can influence the study.
 - i. Participants often respond to expectations of behaviors, or **demand characteristics**.
 - ii. **Social desirability response bias** occurs when participants behave in socially desirable ways.
- c. The **setting (laboratory versus field)** can affect how conclusions can be applied to our everyday lives.
- d. Status and gender role are often **variables confounded with sex** in gender research.
- e. **Situational influences** often affect how people behave more than gender roles.

4. History of the Psychology of Gender

- a. **1894-1936: Sex Differences in Intelligence**
 - i. The primary goal of research in this era was to establish that men were superior to women.
 - ii. Scientists examined the size of the brain.
 - iii. Scientists also examined specific areas of the brain.
- b. **1936-1954: M/F as a Global Personality Trait**
 - i. The concepts of masculinity and femininity were introduced.

- ii. A number of M/F scales were developed, but all suffered from a number of weaknesses.
- c. **1954-1982: Sex Typing and Androgyny**
 - i. The instrumental versus expressive distinction helped conceptualize masculinity and femininity as separate dimensions.
 - ii. The concept of androgyny emerged from the operationalization of masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions.
- d. **1982-Present**
 - i. One major trend recently has been the view of **gender role as multifaceted**.
 - ii. A second recent trend has been an emphasis on the **social context surrounding gender**.
 - iii. **Gender role strain** occurs when gender role expectations have negative consequences for the individual.
 - 1) **Self-role discrepancy theory** states that strain arises when you fail to live up to gender roles society has constructed.
 - 2) **Socialized dysfunctional characteristic theory** states that strain arises because the gender roles society instills can be inherently dysfunctional.

Lecture Ideas – Discussion Starters

Biases in the Scientific Method. Students tend to believe that the scientific method is flawless, especially regarding the elimination of bias in research. They also tend to be unaware of how biases are introduced into every stage of research beginning with the research question through interpretation of results and on to publication biases. Asking students to interpret data is an interesting way to get them to think about how their own expectations and perceptions influence research. There are several ways that you might demonstrate this:

- Ask students to develop research questions that focus on male and female differences. Then discuss how these questions reveal certain biases and then generate ideas about ways to reduce bias in a study designed to explore the research questions they identify.
- Extend the research questions that focus on female-male differences to additional dimensions including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, SES, etc. Adding these dimensions may expose additional preconceptions of other forms of societal biases.
- If you have asked the class to participate in a survey in earlier classes, you can share the class's results and ask students to interpret the findings. It can be very interesting to hear students share their various viewpoints about what findings might demonstrate, or not.

Should we study differences? What do we gain or lose by studying differences? What are the pros and/or cons of studying differences? Are we really that different? What is the impact of emphasizing our differences or similarities? These are interesting questions to pose to class and the discussion can demonstrate how we use information to guide decisions that might be discriminatory. Have students take sides and debate the issue. For additional information, an entire issue of *Feminism & Psychology* is devoted to this question. I have distributed the articles included in this issue for students to review to help them prepare for the debate.

Kitzinger, C. (1994). Should Psychologists Study Sex Differences? *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol. 4, No. 4. 501-506

Activities

Nonsexist Research. The purpose of this exercise is to examine the principles of nonsexist research. To prepare for this exercise, you will need to identify a research study and provide a description of the study that provides opportunities to discuss nonsexist research.

Ask students to critique the study. They should consider the ways the literature review and research questions reflect the bias(es) of the researcher, how the research question(s) influenced the design of the study, determine the extent to which the biases are revealed in the conclusions, etc. Students should also consider such things as the practical significance of the findings, the importance of the research to building scientific knowledge, and potential applications for the finding. Finally, students should propose solutions for addressing these biases.

Nature versus Nurture in the News. A central debate for social scientist is to what degree are our personality and behaviors determined by “nature” (genetic and biological factors) or “nurture” (environmental and social factors). While many of us would argue for an interaction of these factors as contributors for differences in sex and gender, published research findings are often criticized for a less than balanced focus on biological factors that contribute to sex/gender differences.

These types of research findings, highlighting differences, are readily identifiable in the media. Local newspapers, *USA Today*, various popular magazines are good sources of for news items summarizing research findings about gender differences.

Have students locate articles from the popular press or on the web and note the gender differences that are reported in these articles. Students should examine the articles the assumed causes of these differences including differences in physiology, cognitive abilities, social influences, etc. Students should also examine the various explanations and provide alternative conclusions based on the results presented or on the methodology used in the studies being reported.

Femininity and Masculinity. The Bem Sex Role Inventory can be useful in helping students think about how we define masculinity and femininity as either polar opposites as on a continuum, or something else. I have had students take this inventory so that they can have meaningful discussion in class or write a reflection paper. Questions for consideration include asking about the social desirability of the items used in the questionnaire, relevance to current cultural ideas about gender, are the questions and the scale useful for transgendered individuals, etc.?

Websites and Resources:

- Janet T. Spence: <http://www.webster.edu/~woolfm/spence.html>
- Sandra Bem: <http://www.webster.edu/~woolfm/sandrabem.html>
- Joseph Pleck: http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/~hcd/about/pleck_j.html

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Hyde, J.S. (2005). The Gender Similarities Hypothesis. *American Psychologist*. Vol. 60, No. 6, 581–592

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Pollack, W. S. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. New York: Random House.

Spence, J. T., & Sawin, L. L. (1985). Images of masculinity and femininity: A reconceptualization. In V. E. O’Leary, R. K. Unger, and B. S. Wallston (Eds.), *Women, gender, and social psychology* (pp. 35-66). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.