

Introduction

Despite all of the social changes of the last 100 years, stereotypical characterisations of gender have remained remarkably constant; as far as the Western world is concerned.

Williams and Best report similar findings in other cultures; 'stereotyped' beliefs about gender go back to Ancient Greece.

Maccoby and Jacklin found that consistent differences between the sexes were rare and those that were present were small or moderate in degree. There is far more variability *within* sexes than between.

Approaches to developmental psychology in this area have focused on **social influences** or **cognitive processes**; there is contemporary work which tries to reconcile the two.

Key concepts in gender development research

Often "sex" is used to represent biological differences; "gender" for social characteristics, but **Maccoby** argues that assigning biological roots to one characteristic and social ones to another is not rational. It is likely that both biological & social factors interact. The terms are therefore used interchangeably by some.

Gender identity - an individual's sense of being male or female.

Gender role - attributes, behaviours and attitudes that are associated with being male or female.

Gender stereotype - Commonly held beliefs about male and female characteristics, including skills, abilities, dispositions, appearance and behaviour.

Gender typed - the extent to which someone adheres to their gender role.

Book 2 Chapter 5 - Gender Identity and the development of gender roles

w.r.t. roles & stereotypes - similarities exist across many cultures, but **Mead** found substantial differences in some cultures.

Key methods of gender development research

Early research (**Terman & Miles, 1936**): male/female at the opposite ends of a single dimension.

1970's; **Bem**; measurement of masculine/feminine characteristics separated; scoring highly on both = androgynous. **Bem Sex Role Inventory** - self reported psychometric against masculine (e.g. ambitious, competitive, dominant) vs feminine (e.g. gentle, compassionate, tender) characteristics.

Recent; **Lippa and Connelly**; multidimensional approach.

For children - focus has been on concrete preferences, for toys, games and activities e.g. **Golombok and Rust, Pre-School Activities Inventory**.

Degree of gender typing determined by observing play and through parental reports (**Golombok & Rust**).

Early measures of gender role knowledge asked children to say what attributes were male or female to determine their perceptions.

Sex Role Learning Index (SERLI) - made the advance of allowing a characteristic to be assigned to both male and female (**Edelbrock and Sugawara**).

Measurement - self ratings of abstract psychological concepts not appropriate for children to use; same set of toys/activities cannot be used for both pre-school children and adolescents; naturalistic observation may yield rich data but may not provide a reliable index of children's preferences. Have to consider what aspects of gender are being investigated and if the measure is **valid & reliable** (**Golombok & Fivush**)

Approaches to gender development

Five approaches:

Psychoanalytic

Freud - account of psychosexual development, Oedipus complex. Boys are attracted to their mother, fear punishment by their father and resolve the conflict by identifying with their father. Similar (but different) processes account for female sexual identity.

Chodorow - feminist perspective - claims process of identification with the mother is a basis for gender development. Girls identify directly with their mother, boys separate to form their male identity. For girls, retained identification with mother = strong sense of interpersonal relatedness; boys, separation = reject of femininity and a sense of independence.

These views have a wider impact - **Gilligan** argues the different processes boys and girls go through lead to different ways of reasoning about moral dilemmas, e.g. in girls it centres on concerns for the needs and desires of others.

Criticisms of this approach:

- **Freud** - little empirical evidence, few testable hypotheses to generate evidence from.
- More modern versions have intuitive appeal, but inadequate evidence regarding the roles played by processes of identification

But, it has been valuable as an approach in highlighting early childhood as a root of the sense of gender identity.

Social Learning Perspective

Mischel - Gender-typed behaviours are those that lead to different outcomes for one sex than the other. They acquire (learn) them in the same way as other aspects of behaviour.

Consistent with behaviourist approach - learning occurs by conditioning, rewards, punishment & *observation of others' behaviour* (this idea goes beyond previous behaviourist thinking).

Boys and girls are treated differently from birth, but is there evidence that children develop gender-typed behaviours through social experiences - e.g. reward/punishment for role-consistent/inconsistent behaviour?

Maccoby & Jacklin suggest evidence is limited, as they found that boys and girls had very similar experiences; equal affection, independence encouraged, dependent behaviour discouraged, no difference in reactions to aggressive behaviour. More recently, **Lytton and Romney** found that only encouragement to take part in gender-typed activities, particularly by fathers, was significant. But, this in itself may be particularly important.

Langlois and Downs - mothers respond neutrally or +ve to boys playing with girls toys; fathers tend to respond -ve and often with ridicule. (48 children studied, aged 3 & 5 years, observed in two 15 minutes sessions, one with masculine toys, the other with feminine).

Seavey et al; Smith & Lloyd - adults respond in stereotype-consistent ways if they are misled about the sex of an infant.

Not just reward & punishment within SLT - observation also provides social influence. e.g. **Bandura** - Bobo doll. **Perry & Bussey** later showed that observation of multiple same sex models is particularly likely to lead to imitation.

A *vicarious learning* environment about gender is therefore provided by parents, teachers, peers, television etc. But working out how important a model/set of models are is very difficult.

Experimental setups like Bandura's are not like real life; correlations of children's gender typing (**Durkin; Turner and Gervai**) with television viewing *do not show seeing stereotypes causes gender typing*.

SL approaches can be criticised because they do not address developmental mechanisms - e.g. why children's gender-related beliefs and behaviours change as they get older. Cognitive processes therefore need to be considered and children play an important role in determining how their gender develops.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's SCT builds on SL approaches by addressing the fact that development involves complex interactions between many factors.

SCT is a 'model of causation' that links *behaviour, person and environment*, which mutually influence.

SCT acknowledges the active role children have in learning -e.g. selective attention, mental organisation, own agency.

Bussey & Bandura argue negative parental/peer pressure from early in life w.r.t. gender inconsistent behaviour is significant, and their history of socialisation provides distinct information about gender from birth - e.g. clothes, colours, toys etc. Gender stereotypes are also modelled in the family.

Cognitive processes come into play as once children have internalised the 'appropriate' behaviour based on social experiences/rewards/punishment they moderate their own behaviour to conform.

Bussey and Bandura's 1992 study provides evidence for this view.

3-4 year olds asked to evaluate gender-typed behaviour of peers shown on video. The youngest children disapproved of gender inconsistent behaviour; older children were self-critical when asked how they would feel if playing with the 'wrong' toy. These self evaluations predicted how they would play.

Conclusion - social sanctions are evident in younger children, self-regulation becomes more important with age.

Cognitive-Developmental Theory

Children's concepts of themselves as male/female are crucial in them identifying & endorsing gender roles.

Kohlberg recognised the importance of learning through observation, but argued that *gender roles are* not shaped through biological or cultural norms, but *shaped through the ability of children to cognitively organise their social world along gender-role dimensions*.

e.g. Boys think: 'I am a boy, therefore I want to do boy things as this is rewarding'

Gender role development is self-socialised. The child actively seeks out, organises and behaves in accordance with the social information available - a big contrast with the view of gender typed behaviour being driven through reward/punishment.

Similar to **Piaget's** general stage theory of development, **Kohlberg** proposes that gender identity develops in three discrete stages:

Stage 1 - Gender labelling - 3.y.o. - can identify others as male/female; but gender not seen as stable over time or changes in appearance (clothes, hair length).

Stage 2 - Gender stability - 5.y.o. - recognition that boys grow up to be daddies; but unchanging nature of gender not appreciated.

Stage 3 - Gender consistency - 6-7 y.o. - full appreciation of gender permanence.

Kohlberg argues that the mature understanding of gender consistency is vital for the gender-typing process.

Slaby and Frey provides support for the idea that advanced gender concepts are associated with a child's ability to selectively attend to same-sex models. Children who understood gender as a fixed attribute (questionnaire used) were more likely to attend to models of their own gender (shown on video)

However, other research evidence is weak (reviews by **Huston /Ruble and Martin**). Most points to the immature form of gender concept - gender labelling - that is often associated with gender-typed behaviour and stereotyped beliefs. **Bussey and Bandura** provide support.

Gender Schema Theory

Despite limited evidence for **Kohlberg's** views, recent research builds on his basic point that cognitive processes play a major part in the development of gender. The discussion is now about which cognitive processes are most important.

GS theorists argue it is the early, labelling processes, which are the most important (**Martin et al**).

Martin and Halverson argued that emerging **stereotypes** are not just a function of environmental input but **are a normal part of children's information processing**. Stereotypes are an efficient way of handling/predicting from large amounts of sensory data. They are necessary simplifications to make sense of a very complex world. Two main schemas involved:

- (i) in-group/out-group schema (broad categorisation of what is appropriate for boys/girls)
- (ii) own-sex schema (more detailed information about what is appropriate within their own in-group)

The basic proposition put forward by **Kohlberg** ('I am a boy ...') still holds, but it need only reflect gender labelling, rather than gender consistency for the mechanisms to work.

So, unlike SCT, GS proposes children have their own internal self-regulating standards as soon as they label themselves as a boy or girl.

GS allows the understanding of stability and change in gender linked cognition & behaviour to be tracked through the development of children's schemas. May explain why children cling to stereotypes even in the face of parental intervention.

Schemas govern what we attend to. **Bradbard et al** gave unfamiliar toys to 56 children aged 4-9 to explore for a few minutes. A week later, they remembered more detail about same sex than opposite sex toys.

Similarly, **Liben and Signorella** showed 106 primary age children drawing of men/women doing male, female and neutral tasks/jobs. Recall of men doing male and women doing female tasks was significantly better.

Martin and Halverson demonstrated that the influence of gender schema is so strong that children gave distorted stories about role inconsistent pictures a week after being shown them.

GS explains why younger children adhere to stereotypes more strongly than older children. **Martin** found that young children only took account of sex when predicting the type of toy a child in a story would play with; older children took more individuating information into account too - e.g. a girl described as a tomboy would be less likely to play with a doll. Older children develop greater flexibility - e.g. to call on past experiences/information as they develop.

Gender development: an integration

Biggest debate is if the primary focus should be on environmental or cognitive factors.

SLT & SCT focus on the impact of gender related information in the environment.

CDT & GST focus on the impact of cognition in the child.

Contemporary approaches recognise important roles are played by both social and cognitive factors; there is reciprocity between social experiences and (cognitive) gender conceptions.

Social environment influences children's construction of GS, which in turn guide their behaviour in the social environment and their cognitive processing of their experiences.

Banerjee and Lintern - 64 children, 4-9 y.o. predicting toy preferences from a story, found girls better at understanding counter-stereotypical characters would not prefer stereotypical toys. The youngest boys showed rigid adherence to stereotypes and presented themselves as more masculine when asked to state their toy preferences in front of other boys.

8&9 year olds much more flexible in handling counter-stereotypical information; girls more flexible than boys.

This backs up observations that social sanctions for gender-inconsistent behaviour in boys are more severe than in girls - worse to be a sissy than a tomboy.

Levy and Carter - measured individual differences in 2-5 y.o. children by showing picture pairs of masculine, feminine, masculine/feminine and gender neutral toys. Some children responded faster to m/f pairs and were viewed as being highly gender schematised. Reasonable to assume this is where social experiences contribute. All children develop

schemas about masculinity/femininity, but in some they will be more influential than for others depending on their social experiences.

Gender in context

Play interaction and friendship

Maccoby argues sex-segregated peer groups are very important - the setting in which most children discover their compatibility with others of the same sex.

Benenson et al observed 26 same sex groups of 4 & 6 year olds playing with non-gender typed toys.

Boys and girls spend equal time in dyadic interactions.

Boys had a large number of short dyadic interactions; girls fewer but of longer duration => characterisation of feminine gender role of intimacy & interpersonal communication.

Co-ordinated group activity most frequent among 6 y.o. boys => context for the development of competition.

Play therefore may have a significant impact on the development of gender roles.

Ethnographic studies show boys take part in more R&T play; physical fighting more prevalent than in girls.

Blatchford et al - observed that boys play more ball games and take part in fantasy play. Boy's games involved much larger groups than girls.

Parker and Asher - boys in middle childhood have fewer intimate exchanges; have more difficulty in resolving conflict, less validation, less caring.

Thorne points out that generalisations like 'boys emphasise status' & 'girls emphasise intimacy' refer to average differences; further research is required to determine when & why individual boys/girls fall outside the norms for peer interactions.

Academic development

Research has tried to find neuropsychological explanations for apparent gender differences w.r.t. spatial and verbal skills.

However, social context of schooling has shown to be important.

Lummis and Stevenson - research into mathematical ability of 1000's children in Taiwan, Japan & US.

Mothers tended to rate boys higher than girls; but no actual difference was found. It's especially true when mothers rate pre-school children - who haven't had formal instruction in maths.

These expectations are mirrored in children themselves. **Stipek and Gralinski** studied several hundred children between 8-14 y.o. Given questionnaires before and after a maths test. Average marks were not different overall, but girls rated their ability lower, expected to do less well, were less likely to attribute success to high ability and failure to luck, were more likely to say failure was due to low ability. Also less likely to believe success is achieved through effort.

Teachers are an important source of difference - **Dweck et al** - negative feedback to girls is directed at intellectual ability; to boys is often about misbehaviour.

There is no doubt maths, science and engineering courses have difficulty in attracting female students; Colley and Comber found boys have more positive attitudes to computers than girls, despite the widespread teaching of ICT.

Psychological research into social/cognitive factors plays a role in informing intervention strategies in programmes like the UK's WISE (women into science and engineering).

Conclusions

Gender development is complex.

Different methods and theoretical frameworks are used to make sense of it.

Approaches focusing on social environment complement cognitive perspectives and v.v.

Gender development has to be investigated in its natural context to be properly understood.