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SEX AND GENDER


WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Definitions of sex and gender.
- Distinguish between female and male sex and gender.
- Explain what is meant by sex-role stereotypes.
- Make links between sex-role stereotypes and the specification for gender.

Sex and Gender

Sex is a term that is used to describe an individual’s physiological status, such as male or female, whereas gender is used to describe an individual’s psychological identity, such as masculine or feminine. Typically, a biological male will develop a masculine psychological gender identity, and a biological female will develop a feminine psychological gender identity. However, this is not always the case and there are some individuals who experience severe distress when they do not feel like their biological sex matches their psychological gender identity. For example, a biological male may psychologically identify as a female; this is called gender dysphoria.

Sex-Role Stereotypes

Each culture has its own ideas of what is ‘normal’ in terms of behaviour; this is also true of gender behaviours. There are cultural and societal norms (unwritten rules) about what is acceptable behaviour for men and women, and there are pressures for people to conform to these expectations. Examples of these sex-role stereotypes can be seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPES OF FEMALES</th>
<th>SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPES OF MALES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Less emotional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These sex-role stereotypes are socialised through parenting, peer relationships, school and the media. Children and adults are taught what is appropriate for their gender and what is inappropriate. These sex-role stereotypes will then begin to influence other aspects such as games and toys played with, subjects chosen at school and career aspirations. For example, in school more females choose health and social care subjects than males, whereas more males choose science-based subjects than females. This is likely the result of how they have been socialised into sex-role stereotypes.
Sex-Role Stereotypes Applied to the Gender Specification

Throughout the rest of the gender topic you will make several references to sex-role stereotypes, either when describing theories of gender and gender dysphoria, or in your evaluation. Suggested links are included in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
<th>RESEARCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY OF GENDER</td>
<td>Sex-role stereotypes are reinforced directly or indirectly through parents, peers, the media and teachers.</td>
<td>Smith and Lloyd (1978): When adults were presented with a baby dressed in a gender-neutral colour, the way they interact with the baby was determined by the name assigned to the baby (either a girl’s name or a boy’s name) showing that adults use gender stereotypes when interacting with children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON GENDER</td>
<td>Sex-role stereotypes are evident in the media and when people are exposed to them, they shape gender behaviour.</td>
<td>Williams (1981): When television was introduced in a small town in Canada, behaviour was investigated 20 years later to see if it’d had any impact on gender behaviours. There was an increased difference between male and female behaviours, which was in line with sex stereotypes portrayed by the media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON MEDIA</td>
<td>Sex-role stereotypes are determined by where you are in the world, and what your society views as ‘normal’.</td>
<td>Mead (1935): Three tribes were studied in Papa New Guinea and found to have different gender roles. The Arapesh tribe were feminine, the Mundugumor tribe were masculine and the Tchambuli tribe had a reversal of western roles were men were the nurturers and women were the aggressors. This shows the sex-role stereotypes are dependent on culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOLOGY OF GENDER</td>
<td>Sex-role stereotypes have been found cross-culturally.</td>
<td>Williams and Best (1990): When students across 30 different countries were asked to split adjectives into male stereotypes and female stereotypes, there were similarities across all cultures. This trend in sex-role stereotypes cross-culturally suggests that gender is biological and fixed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extension Evaluation: Issues and Debates

- One limitation of research into gender is that it often provides an explanation for the use of sex-role stereotypes in developing gender, which is then criticised for being socially sensitive. They are one of the contributing factors to discrimination and prejudice in society and can create barriers to education and employment. Girls who are socialised to believe that men are stronger and braver, may never consider pursuing a career in sport or the emergency services. Boys who are socialised to believe that they are not supposed to be emotional and are expected to be strong, may never consider themselves to be a primary caregiver to their children. This means that sex-role stereotyping is negatively impacting on people and society by imposing an outdated set of norms and views. Any theory that promotes the use of sex-role stereotypes to develop a gender identity (for example, social learning theory and cognitive schema theory) can be criticised for being socially sensitive, promoting the need for these stereotypes in an era when each gender is demanding equality.
Possible Exam Questions

1. Which one of the following is not an example of a male sex-role stereotype? (1 mark)
   a) Aggression
   b) Dominance
   c) Independence
   d) Emotional

2. Explain what is meant by the term ‘sex-role stereotypes’. (4 marks)
   Exam Hint: This question is asking for more than a definition so try and explain what they are and provide some examples. Avoid too many examples and keep your answer concise. You don’t need to offer studies or a discussion about sex-role stereotypes and if you do, it will cost you crucial exam time.

3. Outline what research has shown about sex-role stereotypes. (6 marks)
   Exam Hint: To answer this question, consider which studies you know and select what may be relevant for this question. Not all studies in gender refer to sex-role stereotypes so you will not gain credit for using them in this question. Use your exam skills to interpret the question accurately. You should notice how this question asks for what has been shown, suggesting that you only need to talk about results and conclusions of research. It may feel more coherent to write aims and procedures first but they will not gain credit.

4. A teacher wanted to investigate reasons why there were gender differences in subject choice at school. She found that subjects such as P.E. and Construction were male-dominated, while subjects such as English and Art were female-dominated. Use your knowledge of sex-role stereotyping to explain why these differences in subject choice may occur. (4 marks)
   Exam Hint: This question is assessing your A01 knowledge and your A02 application skills. When you are explaining your knowledge of sex-role stereotyping, make sure that you refer to the STEM. The strongest candidates will take each subject as mentioned and support by considering the sex-role stereotypes that are going to be relevant to your answer.

5. Kristoff is 6 years old. He wants to play with his sister’s dolls and read her books. His parents have explained to him that these items are for girls and that he has his own boy’s toys and books to use. Referring to the item above, explain how sex-role stereotypes are used by parents to shape children’s gender identity. Use research to support your answer. (6 marks)
   Exam Hint: There are several things for you to do in the question – explain, refer and use research. To reach full marks for this question you will need to fulfil all parts of the question. You do not need to give a full overview of relevant theory, but you do need to use appropriate terms in your explanation. In addition to this, you need to make sure you use Kristoff for some context in your answer. When you refer to research, you only need to use it briefly – stick to findings and conclusions rather than detailed accounts.
ANDROGYNY

**Specification:** Androgyny and measuring androgyny, including the Bem Sex-Role Inventory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define and explain what is meant by the term ‘androgyny.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain the development of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, androgyny.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Androgynty Theory of Gender

There is a wealth of theories that explain how girls develop a female gender identity and how boys develop a male gender identity. For example, psychodynamic theory focuses on how girls and boys are required to identify with the same-sex parent to learn gender, whilst the gender schema theory focuses on how in-groups and out-groups are used to learn appropriate gender roles. Sandra Bem claimed that these rigid gender identities are not conducive to good mental health and proposed ‘androgyny’ (Greek words - ‘andro’, meaning male, and ‘gyny’, meaning female) as an alternative theory of gender identity.

**ANDROGYNY:** describes a gender identity characterised by a healthy balance of masculine and feminine traits. Androgynous individuals adopt traits and characteristics (psychological and/or physical) that are advantageous in coping with the demands of the real world. For example, an extremely feminine female may struggle with challenges in life that require stereotypically masculine traits (physical strength, autonomy) whereas an androgynous female will have the mixture of traits required for all situations and tasks, and will avoid fixed sex-role stereotypes.

**BEM SEX-ROLE INVENTORY (BSRI):** The BSRI is a self-report questionnaire used to measure levels of androgyny. It was devised by Sandra Bem in the 1970s. The tool includes 20 stereotypically masculine traits (e.g. aggression), 20 stereotypically feminine traits (e.g. friendliness) and 20 neutral traits (e.g. honesty). The neutral traits are included to distract people from identifying the distinction between masculine and feminine traits. When individuals complete the BSRI, they are asked to rate themselves on all traits using a Likert scale where 1 indicates ‘never or almost never true’, and 7 indicates ‘almost always true’. After completing the BSRI, calculations produce a feminine, masculine and androgynous score for the individual.
### Evaluating the Androgyny Theory of Gender

- **One advantage of androgyny** is the link it has with mental well-being. One general finding since 1974 is that there is a correlation between androgyny and psychological well-being, with people who are androgynous being more likely to have better self-esteem than those who are not androgynous. **Witt (1997)** suggests that an androgynous gender identity may be more beneficial to children than strict traditional gender roles as this will create more opportunities in careers, hobbies and lifestyles. These findings conclude that societal pressures children and adolescents face could be substantially alleviated by a society that promotes androgyny (rather than rigid gender roles) for people to conform to.
  - However, critics argue that more emphasis should be placed on the masculinity traits of androgynous individuals and claim that it is these traits alone that are crucial to good psychological well-being, not androgyny overall.

- **One limitation of the BSRI** is that it lacks temporal validity. The BSRI was developed in the 1970s and is considered by critics to be outdated as the tool is based on old-fashioned gender stereotypes that are no longer relevant. Modern-day populations who are asked to agree on masculine and feminine stereotypes are not likely to hold the same opinions that laid the foundation for the BSRI. Therefore, the BSRI lacks validity and is no longer an accurate tool for investigating gender.

- The use of self-report methods such as the BSRI are criticised for lacking internal validity. The BSRI requires individuals to rate themselves against traits honestly and accurately, which may lead people to underestimate themselves, misinterpret questions/traits or consciously try to appear desirable to researchers. The consequence of these possibilities is a decrease in the internal validity of the BSRI and any conclusions drawn from research that utilises this tool.

- A strength of the BSRI is that it has been shown to be a reliable tool. Bem gave the BSRI to 600 students and found that a high number did indeed score androgynously. The reliability of these findings was tested during a second study, also conducted by Bem, four weeks after the first study took place. This second study included 56 of the original students who were all asked explicitly not to try and recall how they had answered on their first attempt, four weeks earlier. Bem found that the results from the first and second study correlated significantly, therefore the BSRI as a tool for investigating gender can be concluded as reliable.
Extension Evaluation: Issues and Debates

- Androgyny as a theory of gender is criticised for being **experimentally reductionist**. Gender identity is far too complex to be reduced to a single score in the way that the BSRI does. On the other hand, the androgynous theory of gender is more holistic than other theories since it acknowledges the benefits of having both masculine and feminine traits, whereas others such as the psychodynamic theory do not, instead claiming that children must learn the traditional and rigid masculine or feminine gender roles. Therefore, there are both strengths and limitations to the reductionist nature of androgyny.

- One limitation of androgyny theory is that it may be **ethnocentric**. Claims that androgyny is the healthiest gender identity, ignore the cultural differences that exist worldwide. Androgyny (in particular the masculine traits) is considered crucial to the mental wellbeing of individuals in western cultures; however, other cultures may disagree. As Margaret Mead found in her study of tribes in Papua New Guinea, (see ‘the role of culture’) some tribes valued masculine traits and some valued feminine traits. Therefore, assumptions about androgyny being the most ideal gender identity are culturally biased and should not be imposed on any non-Western culture.

Possible Exam Questions

1. Explain what is meant by the term ‘androgyny’. (2 marks)
   **Exam Hint:** This is a definition question which is only worth 2 marks. You do not need to give elaborate examples or talk about how androgyny is measured using the BSRI, so avoid the temptation to fill your page with everything you know!

2. Aaron and Ahmed are designing a new male superhero as part of their Art homework. Aaron suggests they design a male superhero who is tall and strong with big muscles. Ahmed disagrees and suggests that the superhero should avoid being masculine or feminine because that is not realistic anymore. Using your knowledge of androgyny, explain what Ahmed is referring to. (4 marks)
   **Exam Hint:** The question is only asking you to refer to Ahmed; however, a better answer would still include a reference to Aaron for comparison and to make the answer more coherent. The examiner would expect you to demonstrate your knowledge of androgyny and use the superhero example to give your answer some AO2 application/context.

3. Sabiha’s family encourage her to participate in a range of after school clubs such as dancing, athletics and maths. Aamir’s family encourage him to spend his time participating in sports clubs and woodwork clubs. Using your knowledge of androgyny, explain which student is likely to have better psychological wellbeing and justify your decision. (4 marks)
   **Exam Hint:** Although you could answer this question by choosing one student and providing a justification, a better answer would include a contrast to the other student. You should also have a careful look at the activity examples provided in the question – remember that the information in the STEM is a way of providing students with prompts or clues on what you could write about.

4. Discuss androgyny as a theory of gender. (16 marks)
   **Exam Hint:** This should take you approximately 20 - 25 minutes in the exam; however, most of your time must be spent demonstrating your evaluation skills. After you explain what androgyny is, there will be a temptation to provide lots of examples – just stick to one example and move on otherwise you will be using up your exam time and not adding anything to your essay. In this essay, you have lots of opportunities to use specialist terms such as internal validity and reliability, so use them. Finally, you can still use your compare and contrast skills here and consider why androgyny as a gender identity may be better/worse than what is proposed by other theories you have studied.
The Biological Explanation of Sex and Gender Development

The biological explanation of sex and gender describes how relevant characteristics and traits develop as a result of physiology. This explanation proposes that gender is not learned and is a result of physiology alone. Biologists argue that the role of nature is dominant in the development of gender and that gender development begins at conception; followed by hormonal changes and exposure in the womb; the development of reproductive systems and finally, the influence of the environment on the brain.

CONCEPTION AND CHROMOSOMES: The biological explanation of gender emphasises the importance of conception since this is where the chromosomes of a child are determined. For example, if an egg carrying an X chromosome is fertilised by a sperm carrying an X chromosome, then the child will be genetically female (XX); however, if a sperm carrying a Y chromosome fertilises the egg (always carrying an X chromosome) then the child will be genetically male (XY).

HORMONES: Once the chromosomes of the child are determined (XX or XY) this genetic information alters the hormones released into the body during gestation, approximately two months after conception. Since conception, oestrogen (a hormone which is more dominant in females) will be produced by both XX and XY babies in the womb. However, when the presence of a Y chromosome, in particular, the SRY gene on the Y chromosome (the sex-determining region that is responsible for the initiation of male development) is detected by the brain, this will inhibit oestrogen production and initiate more testosterone production (a hormone which is more dominant in males). The absence of the Y chromosome in genetically female babies means that this hormonal change will not happen, and oestrogen will continue to be dominant. These hormonal differences in XX and XY babies will contribute to physiological differences in gender (such as bone structure, reproductive systems and body shape) and psychological differences in...
gender (such as hemispheric brain dominance). One other significant hormone that differs in males and females is oxytocin. This hormone is released by both XX and XY individuals; however, the presence of testosterone inhibits its effect on males. This hormone is crucial in childbirth, nurturing and regulating emotions such as stress.

**BRAIN:** According to the biological explanation of gender, the chromosomes, hormones and reproductive systems that develop will influence the development of the brain, in particular, the size of the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SDN): an area associated with our psychological gender identity. The hormone testosterone is implicated in the size of the SDN and therefore the SDN is approximately 2.5 times bigger in genetic males than in genetic females. This difference in biology contributes to the psychological gender identity, as well as some psychological gender differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALES</th>
<th>FEMALES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GENETICS/CHROMOSOMES</td>
<td>XY</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMINANT HORMONES</td>
<td>Testosterone</td>
<td>Oestrogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OXYTOCIN</td>
<td>Oxytocin inhibited</td>
<td>Oxytocin not inhibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYSIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES</td>
<td>Male reproductive system (Testes)</td>
<td>Female reproductive system (Ovaries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAIN STRUCTURE</td>
<td>Larger SDN</td>
<td>Smaller SDN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evaluating the Biological Explanation of Sex and Gender Development**

- One advantage of the biological explanation of gender is the research support it has gathered. **Young (1966)** manipulated the amount of testosterone exposed to unborn baby rats and found that the female offspring were born masculinised. The masculinised female offspring played more aggressively, had an increased size in the SND, and they demonstrated more exploratory behaviour, in contrast to female offspring who were not exposed to more testosterone in utero. This provides support for the claim that hormones and physiology are highly influential in gender development.
  - However, it can be argued that since this study is based on animals and faces extrapolation issues, this is not valuable support for the biological theory since human gender is influenced largely by psychological identity as well as physical identity and is therefore perhaps more complex than gender development in animals.

- The fixed nature of gender proposed by the biological theory is supported by research. **Money (1967)** aimed to support his hypothesis that children are born gender-neutral and that gender is the result of nurture rather than biology. His case study on Bruce Reimer, a genetic male who was raised as a girl, was used to investigate this hypothesis. Despite hormone treatment, surgery and being raised by his parents as female, Bruce (who was living as Brenda) did not identify as a female and in adult life, reversed the surgery and continued to live as a male. This case study provides crucial support for the biological explanation of gender, and disputes contrasting theories about gender being neutral at birth and influenced by nurture. Therefore, it can be concluded that biology appears to be the strongest influence in determining gender.

- One limitation of the biological approach of gender is the oversimplification of hormones. The approach proposes that there are distinct male hormones (testosterone) and female hormones (oestrogen) however, many argue that this is a very simplified view of hormones. Both of these hormones are found in men and women in different concentrations and are not isolated to each gender, which the biological approach appears to suggest. Therefore, the endocrine system involved in gender identity is more complex than initially proposed.

- One advantage of the approach is that it is considered **scientifically credible**. The approach meets the
key features expected of science. For example, this explanation is objective and makes use of investigations that rely upon hormones, genetics and brain scans, all of which are not likely to be misinterpreted in the same ways that case studies could be. In addition to this, the explanation is falsifiable and is able to operationalise gender in research through chromosomes and the size of SDN regions of the brain. This means that not only can this explanation be scientifically supported, it can also be ‘disproven’ which is the hallmark of falsifiability, according to Karl Popper.

Extension Evaluation: Issues and Debates

- The biological theory is criticised for taking a biologically reductionist view of gender. It assumes that this complex psychological and physiological part of our identity can be broken down to the lowest level of explanation - genes and hormones. As a consequence, the theory ignores the roles of any nurturing influences such as culture or media. For example, by the time children are five years old, they have already established some biological gender development and have been exposed to gender roles and stereotypes in their environment. This makes it incredibly hard to disentangle nature and nurture influences, concluding that the biological theory of gender should acknowledge a broader, more holistic view of gender.

- One limitation of the biological theory is that it is biologically deterministic. The theory considers gender to be a fixed part of our identity and not flexible at all. This rigid view of gender suggests that there is no room for free will or control in our gender identity, which can be argued to be socially sensitive. Since gender identity is no longer restricted to ‘male’ and ‘female’ sex categories, this theory would fail to accommodate the fluidity of gender and may reinforce stereotypical and outdated views in society that no such other sex categories exist. Therefore, theories that promote free will in developing a gender identity may be more ethical and in line with cross-cultural differences in gender.

Possible Exam Questions

1. Which one of the following is an example of a male-dominant hormone? (1 mark)
   a) Oxytocin  
   b) Oestrogen  
   c) Progesterone  
   d) Testosterone

2. Explain the role of genetics in gender development. (4 marks)
   
   Exam Hint: Responses must refer to the chromosomes and distinguish between male chromosomes and female chromosomes, you should keep focused on the development of gender and not become distracted by too much biology. Although in this theory genetics lead to hormonal changes, the question asks you to focus on genetics so you must follow the command.

3. Aamir and Jessica are talking to each other about gender. Aamir says that gender is ‘fixed’ whilst Jessica disagrees and argues that gender is ‘neutral’. Use your knowledge of psychology to explain why both Aamir and Jessica may be accurate. (4 marks)

   Exam Hint: It is crucial that you recognise that this question is assessing both your application skills and knowledge of gender. In your answer, you must make sure that you are able to comment on Aamir and Jessica and that you are able to do this whilst explaining that gender can be considered fixed and neutral.

4. Identify and explain two physiological differences between males and females according to the biological theory of gender. (4 marks)
5. Discuss the biological explanation of gender. (16 marks)
Exam Hint: This should take you approximately 20 - 25 minutes in the exam; however, the majority of your time has to be spent demonstrating your evaluation skills. You do not need a certain number of evaluation points; however, you should be able to limit your evaluation to 3 or 4 evaluation points providing you develop them appropriately. This question is not asking you to focus on other explanations however, good answers will include some contrast to other theories such as social learning theory. It is really important that you do not get distracted by the contrasting theory – always come back to the theory that is actually in the question.

6. Identify and explain two limitations of the biological explanation of gender. (6 marks)
Exam Hint: This question is asking for limitations specifically so your points must be weaknesses; however, you could still develop these two points by briefly adding a countercriticism. The question also asks you for two limitations, so there is no point in doing more than this. When you write your limitations, have a clear point in mind for each one and avoid repetition in your answer.

7. Discuss what research has told us about the biological explanation of gender. (16 marks)
Exam Hint: This question includes the command word ‘discuss’ and is worth 16 marks so this should highlight to you that you are expected to both outline and evaluate in your answer. It is really important that you note the word ‘research’. In a question like this, the term refers to studies and/or theories. Many students may read this question and interpret it as an essay where you can only discuss studies, but this is not the case.