

Discovering Psychology: Updated Edition

17 Sex and Gender

- 1 01:00:17:24 >> ZIMBARDO: Is gender genetically based, or do we learn to be feminine or masculine?
- 2 01:00:26:06 >> Let's get the rhythm of the feet.
- 3 01:00:28:28 >> ZIMBARDO: How important is gender to children?
- 4 01:00:36:24 What sexual stereotypes does our culture create?
- 5 01:00:42:06 "Sex and Gender," this time on *Discovering Psychology* .
- 6 01:01:18:24 >> Do it again.
- 7 01:01:20:19 Okay, that's good.
- 8 01:01:22:13 Here he comes.
- 9 01:01:24:28 Come on, baby.
- 10 01:01:27:10 >> Come on, baby.
- 11 01:01:28:03 >> Okay, we've got one shoulder.
- 12 01:01:29:01 >> Oh, god.
- 13 01:01:30:09 >> How about a big boy?
- 14 01:01:32:00 >> You got your boy.
- 15 01:01:33:15 (*baby wailing*) >> ZIMBARDO: Even before we ask about a newborn's health, we want to know whether it's a girl or a boy.
- 16 01:01:40:19 Sex is the first and, perhaps, the most basic way in which we categorize people throughout their lives.
- 17 01:01:51:09 Why is it so important to know the sex of an infant?
- 18 01:01:54:20 Because we have very different perceptions of what each sex is like, what they're capable of, how they should be treated, what's best for them, and even what their value is to society.

- 19 01:02:06:04 And in turn, these ideas color our perception of them from birth to adulthood.
- 20 01:02:13:15 Research by Zella Luria and Jeffrey Rubin has revealed just how differently parents see their infant males and females, even within 24 hours of birth.
- 21 01:02:23:22 Daughters are typically described as beautiful, delicate, and weak, while sons are seen as strong, coordinated, and alert, even when there are no differences between them in weight, health, and strength.
- 22 01:02:37:10 >> Oh, you've got a big boy here.
- 23 01:02:40:17 >> ZIMBARDO: The differences that do exist between males and females at birth are biologically innate, universal, and essential for reproduction: differences in sexual organs, genes, and hormones.
- 24 01:02:55:25 The significance of sex categorization goes far beyond biological characteristics.
- 25 01:03:02:00 The fact of being male or female directs all of us to a very different psychological and social environments.
- 26 01:03:12:13 The different cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, different expectations and experiences, all of the psychological and social meanings attached to the categories of male and female are what we mean by gender.
- 27 01:03:27:11 Although biological sex establishes the initial categorization, gender is learned rather than innate.
- 28 01:03:38:05 We define women and men not only by their sexual organs, but also by the way they behave, how they look and dress, what rules they follow in order to be acceptable and appropriate, and what roles they are allowed or encouraged to play.
- 29 01:03:52:21 And these characteristics are subject to enormous cultural influences.
- 30 01:03:57:19 In fact, when we talk about something as basic as femininity and masculinity, we're really talking about gender roles.
- 31 01:04:05:25 >> Now, just to re-enact what we all missed 50 years ago...
- 32 01:04:09:22 >> ZIMBARDO: These roles are two sets of traits and

- behaviors that are supposed to identify and distinguish men and women.
- 33 01:04:16:21 Like other roles, they are based on socially-prescribed expectations; in this case, about ideal sexual types.
- 34 01:04:27:15 The feminine role in the United States is gentle, emotional, dependent.
- 35 01:04:38:00 The masculine role is aggressive, independent, dominant.
- 36 01:04:52:11 Gender roles are often portrayed as polar opposites and even mutually exclusive, but psychological research has found out that not only is it possible for men to be feminine and women to be masculine some or all of the time, but also that masculinity and femininity are not opposites at all.
- 37 01:05:11:04 People can have both masculine and feminine characteristics.
- 38 01:05:14:17 They can be both strong and emotional, gentle and assertive.
- 39 01:05:18:06 They are defined as psychologically androgynous, a term coined by Sandra Bem, who argues that a blend of masculinity and femininity results in greater behavioral adaptiveness.
- 40 01:05:30:20 It's also commonly assumed that many observed sex differences in behavior result from either biological or social forces, when in fact it's usually a complex interweaving of both.
- 41 01:05:44:16 >> Bang, bang, bang, bang!
- 42 01:05:47:24 Yeah!
- 43 01:05:49:23 >> ZIMBARDO: For example, one of the most reliably-found sex differences in children around the world is that boys are more likely than girls to engage in rough-and-tumble play.
- 44 01:06:01:12 This male/female difference seems to be linked to sex hormones.
- 45 01:06:05:18 However, the amount and form of social play is shaped by cultural learning experiences.
- 46 01:06:18:23 This sex difference in social play occurs in most mammals

and has been studied extensively in two animal species -- the vervet monkey and the Norway rat -- as seen in this original, experimental footage taken by developmental neuroscientist Michael Meaney of McGill University.

- 47 01:06:37:18 >> If you look at both rats and monkeys, and you look at the kids, what you find is that the boys and girls are doing very different things.
- 48 01:06:46:12 That the boys are more likely to be involved in rough play -- wrestling, boxing, what have you -- vigorous forms of physical play The girls are more likely to be involved in more quiet types of social activities -- equally social, but quieter -- grooming, tending to infants.
- 49 01:07:04:06 These are exactly the same type of differences that you see in young nursery school children.
- 50 01:07:08:28 The boys and girls are using very different types of motor activities.
- 51 01:07:12:04 Boys are using gross motor activity, more vigorous forms of activity.
- 52 01:07:16:02 Females, it's more fine motor activity, more discreet type of movements.
- 53 01:07:22:08 So functionally what occurs is that young boys and young girls engage in behaviors as juveniles, as adolescents, from which they're most likely to benefit from as adults.
- 54 01:07:34:09 Now they don't do this because they think that later on down the road it's going to have a payoff for them.
- 55 01:07:38:16 They do it because it feels good, it's fun.
- 56 01:07:41:28 And different types of behaviors are fun for males than for females.
- 57 01:07:48:02 These behaviors, as with any behavior, stimulate different parts of the brain, and these particular regions in the brain are different to males and females because of the actions of sex hormones during the perinatal life.
- 58 01:08:00:06 The different activities stimulate different areas of the brain; males and females find different types of activities pleasurable as a function of this differing level of stimulation in the brain.

- 59 01:08:11:16 What we're looking at here is the real essence of the interaction that occurs between hormonal events and environmental events.
- 60 01:08:17:13 Early in life, the sex hormones cause differences in the brain.
- 61 01:08:21:16 This is a hormonal event.
- 62 01:08:23:01 These differences in the brain later lead to differences in behavior; differences in the types of experiences that young boys and young girls have.
- 63 01:08:30:28 These differences in experience, an environmental event, then lead to differences in behavior amongst the adults.
- 64 01:08:40:17 >> ZIMBARDO: Another example of the interaction of biology and psychology in creating sex differences is physical health.
- 65 01:08:48:01 Contrary to the stereotype that men are strong and women are weak, it is males who are more vulnerable to disease, physical disorders, and death.
- 66 01:08:57:11 In fact, they're more vulnerable in all stages of the life cycle, from the womb to an early arrival at the tomb...
- 67 01:09:04:09 (*coughs*) ...unfortunately.
- 68 01:09:08:16 Biological factors clearly play a role.
- 69 01:09:11:26 For example, men are at greater risk for any physical handicaps and diseases that are genetically based, including recessive disorders such as hemophilia and color blindness.
- 70 01:09:23:28 Women, on the other hand, seem to be protected against the risk of heart disease by female hormones.
- 71 01:09:31:21 Learned behaviors, which make up a central part of the traditional masculine gender role, may play an even larger part in men's physical health.
- 72 01:09:42:03 Men are more likely to smoke, to drink alcohol, take physical risk, use weapons, have jobs that expose them to carcinogens, and work in occupations that are more hazardous.
- 73 01:09:57:05 As a result of these behaviors, men are more likely than

women to die from heart disease, lung cancer, bronchitis, emphysema, cirrhosis of the liver, accidents, suicide, and homicide.

- 74 01:10:11:13 In other words, the masculine gender role combined with physiological differences can be hazardous to men's health.
- 75 01:10:19:01 (*baby crying*) Some sex differences develop over time and may be strongly influenced by learned gender roles.
- 76 01:10:30:26 Consider crying -- all babies cry, whether they're male or female.
- 77 01:10:35:27 But as they grow up, most males are taught to hold back their tears.
- 78 01:10:39:22 As the saying goes, "Big boys don't cry."
- 79 01:10:42:18 Most females, however, are taught that crying is okay and can even be used to their advantage, to get their way with other people.
- 80 01:10:49:25 So boys get criticized for crying and girls typically get reinforced for it.
- 81 01:10:54:12 And lo and behold, we find a behavioral difference between the sexes.
- 82 01:10:58:08 The important point here is that this and many other gender differences are entirely learned as part of the socialization process, which prepares the young to take their place in society when they're adults.
- 83 01:11:10:02 So here's an instance of a physiological function -- shedding tears -- that comes to be influenced by social learning.
- 84 01:11:18:17 How does such learning take place?
- 85 01:11:20:28 From the day they are born, children grow up in a social-cultural environment that is full of messages about gender, like these advertising images.
- 86 01:11:42:09 Girls and boys are dressed differently, they get different toys to play with, and they're given different chores to do around the house.
- 87 01:11:52:06 They also see women and men dressing differently, behaving differently, and occupying different roles.

- 88 01:11:59:24 >> Play a good game, all right?
- 89 01:12:01:12 Give me a hand.
- 90 01:12:02:06 Give me a hand.
- 91 01:12:03:03 >> ZIMBARDO: Dad coaches the soccer team.
- 92 01:12:04:24 >> Okay, who's going to win today?
- 93 01:12:06:03 >> We are!
- 94 01:12:08:23 >> ZIMBARDO: While mom cheers from the sideline.
- 95 01:12:11:27 >> Keep on it, keep on it.
- 96 01:12:15:13 Let's go, Mike.
- 97 01:12:16:13 Keep going, Mikey.
- 98 01:12:17:16 Yeah!
- 99 01:12:18:03 >> Yeah!
- 100 01:12:18:28 >> All right, whoo!
- 101 01:12:23:08 Mike, nice playing.
- 102 01:12:24:22 Good shot.
- 103 01:12:27:18 >> ZIMBARDO: These differences in behavior are also reflected by the television and movies they watch and the books they read.
- 104 01:12:36:15 Not only do children observe these gender patterns, they're also directly affected by them.
- 105 01:12:42:14 Boys and girls are constantly rewarded for behaving in gender-appropriate ways and punished for gender-inappropriate responses.
- 106 01:12:54:24 Such rewards and punishments are often social ones, such as praise or scolding, and they come from important people in children's lives -- their teachers, parents, and peers.
- 107 01:13:08:05 >> What does that look like to you?
- 108 01:13:09:21 >> It's a machine gun.

- 109 01:13:11:02 >> Oh, I see.
- 110 01:13:13:05 >> ZIMBARDO: According to Jeanne Block of the University of California at Berkeley, these social experiences create different psychological environments for girls and boys.
- 111 01:13:22:14 This affects the way children think about themselves and the world around them.
- 112 01:13:27:07 >> Children, it seems to me, develop in different kinds of contexts.
- 113 01:13:32:04 And the context for a little girl is more structured, it's more supervised, and it's more circumscribed so that she's protected from experience.
- 114 01:13:45:17 >> Before we go, we have to get some...
- 115 01:13:49:28 >> The parents of girls encourage the girls to stay closer to them.
- 116 01:13:54:27 >> Quiz kid bag.
- 117 01:13:59:23 Amy...
- 118 01:14:00:26 >> I did it!
- 119 01:14:01:26 >> Everything tends to focus the little girl on the house.
- 120 01:14:05:12 >> Please take this and stick it in the linen closet.
- 121 01:14:08:29 >> The chores they're given are also chores that encourage them to be in the house.
- 122 01:14:14:27 The embeddedness of the girls in the family network from a very early age insulates them, to some extent, from experience.
- 123 01:14:31:06 Boys, as they are presently socialized in this culture, are provided more opportunities for discovering, for inventing, and for actively understanding the world in which they live.
- 124 01:14:49:05 He enters activities with a premise that he can make a difference, that he can create effects.
- 125 01:14:58:13 Boys play outside more.
- 126 01:15:00:28 They play more actively.

- 127 01:15:04:15 They change the nature of their activities more.
- 128 01:15:08:07 They find it more difficult to sit still.
- 129 01:15:12:19 Related to activity is a sex difference in curiosity and exploratory behaviors.
- 130 01:15:21:16 Boys are more curious; they want to know how things work.
- 131 01:15:26:22 Males have a more extensive network of friends.
- 132 01:15:31:07 However, these friends tend not to be as intimate as the friends of females.
- 133 01:15:41:06 For females, interpersonal relationships appear to be more salient, more important than they are for males.
- 134 01:15:48:16 And so that females have fewer friends, but more intimate, intense friendships.
- 135 01:15:54:14 >> ZIMBARDO: In other words, we tend to give our girls roots and our boys wings.
- 136 01:16:04:28 There are, of course, both positive and negative consequences to these kinds of sex differences.
- 137 01:16:10:23 For men, the positive side is the freedom to leave home and family for work; the freedom to take risks, to innovate, to explore, to challenge the status quo.
- 138 01:16:22:10 On the negative side, however, is the strong possibility of forming an identity tied to success in business or career and not to feelings of personal satisfaction or a sense of belonging to a community or a tight-knit family.
- 139 01:16:37:13 Many men who are very successful complain that they have no close friends and even feel distant from their own families.
- 140 01:16:46:27 As for women, the positive side is that they are more able to express their feelings and to show their concern and caring for other people.
- 141 01:16:55:02 They are freer to ask for and give help and friendship.
- 142 01:16:58:28 They also take more time and effort to build a social-support network of family and friends.
- 143 01:17:06:23 The negative side includes constraints imposed by society

and the self on intellectual development.

- 144 01:17:13:18 There are also artificial limits imposed on what women are expected to achieve in many areas, such as science and technology or ones that involve solitary activity, risk taking, or physical strength.
- 145 01:17:26:13 >> And I had got... went to the drugstore and bought some sleeping pills.
- 146 01:17:31:15 I was planning to take them.
- 147 01:17:33:00 >> ZIMBARDO: In addition, a greater focus on one's feelings and moods among women seems to make them susceptible to depression.
- 148 01:17:40:11 There's also the reality of greater poverty and responsibility for child care among women who are single parents, which contributes to depression as well.
- 149 01:17:51:16 And yet, even though our social experiences from childhood onward create different psychological environments for males and females, it would be a mistake to assume that they respond passively to these experiences.
- 150 01:18:04:26 On the contrary, children are actively involved in shaping their own understanding of gender.
- 151 01:18:12:07 Eleanor Maccoby of Stanford is an expert on gender differences.
- 152 01:18:16:29 For years, she has been studying how boys and girls use gender as a basic category to understand the world around them.
- 153 01:18:25:14 >> By about the age of two, the second birthday, you begin to see tendencies for children to approach others of their own sex more often.
- 154 01:18:35:02 And in our own work, when we bring in pairs of young children who are not yet three years old -- either two boys, two girls, or a mixed-sex pair -- we find that the children play more actively and more comfortably when they are paired with a child of their own gender.
- 155 01:18:48:24 Now, this suggests that there is something compatible about the play styles of the two sexes -- that is to say, of same-sex pairs -- so that by the time children get into nursery school,

- there is a foundation already laid for them to prefer same-sex playmates.
- 156 01:19:07:22 And in nursery school, it is very evident that, in fact, they do have that preference.
- 157 01:19:13:05 It isn't as strong, however, as it is by the time they get into school by the age of six.
- 158 01:19:19:15 There you find segregation is much more extreme.
- 159 01:19:24:07 I think that one of the reasons for the change is that, after about the age of three-and-a-half or four, children begin to have a much firmer idea of their own gender and the gender of other children.
- 160 01:19:36:22 If a child tries to play openly with a child of the other sex, and frequently, and makes a favored friend out of that other child, that child is going to be teased.
- 161 01:19:47:19 And the children themselves seem to be monitoring all of this, so there's a great deal of social pressure that is brought about by the kids themselves.
- 162 01:19:56:20 One interesting thing about all of this, I think, is that children seem to segregate more strongly when they're in situations where they're making the choices themselves rather than in situations that have been set up for them by adults.
- 163 01:20:09:25 This is one of the reasons that I don't believe adults are mainly responsible for this tendency for children to congregate in same-sex groups.
- 164 01:20:18:13 I think it's something that the children will do themselves if adults don't do it for them.
- 165 01:20:26:05 >> ZIMBARDO: Boys and girls also use language differently.
- 166 01:20:29:29 >> The boys are more demanding and commanding in their styles of trying to get what they want.
- 167 01:20:36:03 Girls tend to influence each other by suggestions and hints and statements like "why don't we" or "let's."
- 168 01:20:46:11 Boys are very much more likely to give a command, a directive, to interrupt one another, to top each other's stories, to use language for showoff.

- 169 01:20:56:06 Girls seem to use language more for social cohesion within a group.
- 170 01:21:00:17 They are more likely to wait, give another person a chance to have a turn to speak.
- 171 01:21:05:26 And when they start to speak, they're more likely to refer to what the other person has just said.
- 172 01:21:10:29 >> Let's get the rhythm of the hands.
- 173 01:21:13:24 Let's get the rhythm of the feet.
- 174 01:21:17:07 >> Now, of course, there are very bossy girls, but they boss in a way that's different from the ways boys boss.
- 175 01:21:24:02 So that it turns out that even for quite young children, boys can get girls to do what they ask them to do, or I should say, order them to do.
- 176 01:21:35:19 Girls have more trouble influencing the behavior of boys.
- 177 01:21:39:15 Now we know that in any human relationship, people stay together as friends or coworkers more easily and more voluntarily if each person can influence the other, so we have an initial reason why girls pull away from playing with boys.
- 178 01:21:55:04 And in fact, they seem to be the ones that first start preferring same-sex playmates.
- 179 01:22:03:03 Young children are very intense stereotypers, especially when they're between the ages of, say, six and ten.
- 180 01:22:10:14 I think this is the time when they over-exaggerate what they see around them in the way of sex roles, so that even a child whose own mother is a policeman may believe very strongly that only men are policemen.
- 181 01:22:24:16 These things are picked up from television, from observing the people that they see around them.
- 182 01:22:30:27 It's for this reason that I don't believe individual parents can have as much affect on what children believe about gender and what they themselves might become as you would otherwise expect... certainly not at this age.
- 183 01:22:44:04 When they get to be teenagers, then they can begin to look

at the example their parents set, perhaps, a little more strongly.

- 184 01:22:50:10 So it's my feeling that the way to change children's stereotypes is to change society, because they are drawing generalizations from what they see.
- 185 01:23:03:07 >> ZIMBARDO: Now, we all know that when girls and boys grow up, they often find themselves in different occupations and different social roles.
- 186 01:23:10:21 But researchers have never been able to link this phenomenon to innate sex differences.
- 187 01:23:15:25 In truth, women and men are often much more similar than different in almost all of their psychological traits and abilities.
- 188 01:23:23:22 When differences do exist -- and we've seen that some do -- they're often fairly small, more a matter of degree than a difference in kind.
- 189 01:23:33:08 Physical ability, for example.
- 190 01:23:35:00 A woman like Steffi Graf may not be able to beat the very best male tennis stars, but she can easily beat all the other male players.
- 191 01:23:46:02 In track, top male runners are now only about ten percent faster than top women runners, and this difference is getting smaller with better training, nutrition, and higher expectations for women.
- 192 01:24:00:07 For the most part, male and female abilities overlap once their training is comparable.
- 193 01:24:08:19 When job requirements are described simply in terms of the skills or talents necessary for the job without mentioning sex, anyone who can meet those requirements, whether male or female, would then be qualified for the job -- like female astronaut, Sally Ride.
- 194 01:24:25:16 Traditionally, however, job requirements have been phrased so that only one sex is seen fit for a certain job.
- 195 01:24:36:14 What's important to recognize in all this is that how we think males and females differ influences our judgments more than how they actually do or don't differ.

- 196 01:24:47:06 Thus, gender represents an important way in which we make social categorizations of people.
- 197 01:24:59:16 We even create gender stereotypes in advertisements like this one -- the macho male, the flirtatious female -- and we act according to these stereotypes if we think that others expect it of us.
- 198 01:25:13:25 We also tend to elicit from others the kind of stereotypic behavior we expect of them.
- 199 01:25:21:01 In many different ways, gender stereotypes can channel our behavior and narrow the options available to us.
- 200 01:25:28:11 They constrain what others and we ourselves expect and demand.
- 201 01:25:32:18 In this way, they serve not only to limit our freedom, but also to narrow the range of our experiences.
- 202 01:25:40:28 Of course, sex isn't the only category people use to organize the world into simple units.
- 203 01:25:46:27 They also categorize others in terms of age.
- 204 01:25:50:10 Although earlier researchers and theorists tended to study development from birth through adolescence, a relatively new focus of psychology is the entire life cycle, including adulthood, old age, and death.
- 205 01:26:06:25 How we mature and age, next time.
- 206 01:26:09:09 I'm Philip Zimbardo.
- 207 01:26:13:12 [Captioned by The Caption Center WGBH Educational Foundation]