

Culture & Gender

* Sex roles, in contrast describe behaviors that men & women engage in that directly relate to their biological differences: the process of reproduction i.e. breast feeding

+ Sexual identity is the degree of awareness/recognition of one's sex; sex roles i.e. a male's awareness that he can impregnate a female; how to do it.

In contrast, **gender** refers to the behaviors that a culture deems appropriate for men and women. These behaviors may or may not be related to sex and sex roles, although they often are. **Gender role** refers to the degree to which a person adopts the gender-specific behaviors ascribed by his or her culture. For example, traditional gender roles suggest that males are aggressive and unemotional (with the exception of anger) and that the male should leave the home every day to make a living and be the principal wage earner. Traditional gender roles for females suggest that women are nurturant, caring, and emotional and that they should stay at home and take care of the children. **Gender identity** refers to the degree to which a person has awareness or recognition that he or she adopts a particular gender role. And **gender stereotypes** refer to the psychological or behavioral characteristics typically associated with men and women.

Not everyone can be pigeonholed into stereotypes according to sex or gender roles, as there are considerable individual differences across people with regard to these roles. In addition, gender role stereotypes interact with other forms of group membership. Separating the biological facts of sex from the behavioral aspects of gender is the first step in understanding differences between males and females. Indeed, it should become clear from this differentiation that we are mostly concerned with gender differences, not sex differences. Culture is likely to influence our perception of gender differences.

GENDER DIFFERENCES ACROSS CULTURES

Research on sex and gender differences within the U.S. has demonstrated how men and women are different, or not, on a variety of psychological and behavioral outcomes. But do the same differences occur in other cultures. And if so, to what degree? In this section, we describe major findings in the field that document how the nature and size of sex differences themselves differ across cultures.

Hofstede's Study

In Chapter 1, we discuss research by Hofstede who studied work-related attitudes across 50 countries. As you might remember, Hofstede (1980) conducted a large-scale survey of work-related values in a major multinational corporation. Based on the data obtained, he generated four dimensions of differentiation among the cultures in his sample. One of these dimensions was called "Masculinity v. Femininity." This dimension refers to the degree to which a culture will foster, encourage, or maintain differences between males and females. In Hofstede's research, Japan, Austria, Venezuela, and Italy had the highest Masculinity vs. Femininity scores, while Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden had the lowest scores.

Hofstede (2001) identified key differences between masculine and feminine cultures in terms of sexuality (Table 6.1). For instance, cultures high on masculinity tended to have moralistic attitudes about sex, had double standards about sex (i.e., women should be virgins at marriage but not men), and had norms encouraging passive roles of women. Cultures low on masculinity tend to have matter-of-fact attitudes about sex, a single standard concerning sex for men and women, and norms that encouraged an active role for women in society.

Table 6.1**Key Differences Between Low and High Masculine Societies Concerning Sexuality and Religion**

Low Masculinity	High Masculinity
<i>In Sexual Behavior</i>	
Matter-of-fact attitudes about sex.	Moralistic attitudes about sex.
AIDS prevention campaigns very outspoken.	AIDS prevention campaigns restricted by taboos.
Single standard for women and men.	Double standard: Women should be chaste at marriage yet men needn't.
Norm of active role of woman.	Norm of passive role of woman.
Sexual attraction unrelated to career success.	Men become more attractive by career success, women less.
In uncertainty-accepting cultures, few teenage pregnancies.	In uncertainty-accepting cultures, frequent teenage pregnancies.
Young people more influenced by parents.	Young people more influenced by peers.
Other-oriented sex.	Ego-oriented sex.
Women enjoy first sex.	Women feel exploited by first sex.
Unwanted intimacies not major issue.	Sexual harassment major issue.
Homosexuality is a fact of life.	Homosexuality is a taboo and a threat.
Weak distinction between sex and love.	Sharp distinction between sex and love.
Sex and violence in media taboo.	Sex and violence in media frequent.
Lovers should be educated, social.	Lovers should be successful, attractive.
Happy lovers overbenefit from the other.	Happy lovers get equitable mutual deal.
Interaction with other sex more intimate.	Interaction with other sex less intimate.
Sex is a way of relating to someone.	Sex is a way of performing.
<i>In Religion</i>	
"Tender" religions and religious currents.	"Tough" religions and religious currents.
Secularization in Christian countries.	Maintenance of traditional Christianity.
Religion not so important in life.	Religion most important in life.
Religion focuses on fellow human beings.	Religion focuses on God or gods.
Children socialized toward responsibility and politeness.	Children socialized toward religious faith.
Exemplarism and mysticism.	Traditionalism, theism, and conversionism.
Dominant religions stress complementarity of the sexes.	Dominant religions stress male prerogative.
Men and women can be priests.	Only men can be priests.
Sex is for procreation and recreation.	Sex is primarily for procreation.
Positive or neutral attitude toward sexual pleasure.	Negative attitude toward sexual pleasure.
Sexuality as one area of human motivation.	Sexuality as primordial area of human motivation.

Source: From *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.) by G. H. Hofstede, 2001. p. 330. Copyright © 2001 by Geert Hofstede. Reprinted with permission by Geert Hofstede B. V.

Masculine and feminine cultures also differed in their attitudes about religion. Masculine cultures tend to be more traditional, focusing on religion, and focused on god or gods. Feminine cultures tend to be less traditional, emphasize the importance of religion in life less, and focus on fellow humans.

Hofstede's study was important because his findings highlighted that cultures will arrive at different ways of dealing with differences between men and women. The behaviors men and women engage in produce different psychological outcomes that have direct ramifications for actual life behaviors. Cultures vary in how they act on these gender differences, with some cultures fostering and encouraging great differences between the genders and other cultures minimizing those differences. At the same time, close inspection of the contents of Table 6.1 and Hofstede's (1980) original data suggest that Masculinity in this dimension may also be interpreted as "Materialism."

Cognitive Differences

It is common folklore that males are better at mathematical and spatial reasoning tasks, whereas females are better at verbal comprehension tasks. An analysis of the scores for males and females on standardized tests in elementary school, college entrance examinations, or graduate school entrance examinations shows some degree of support for these notions, although the difference between males and females seems to have narrowed in recent years. Years ago, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) concluded in their review of the literature that males tend to do better on spatial tasks and other tasks having a spatial component.

But early on, Berry (1966) pointed out that such differences do not appear to exist among males and females of the Inuit culture in Canada. Berry suggested that the gender difference did not exist because "spatial abilities are highly adaptive for both males and females in Inuit society, and both boys and girls have ample training and experience that promote the acquisition of spatial ability" (Berry et al., 1992, p. 65). Following up on the possibility of cultural differences on this gender difference, Berry (1976) and his colleagues conducted a study in which a block design task was given to males and females in 17 different cultures. A stimulus card depicting a geometric representation of a set of blocks was presented and the task was to manipulate an actual set of blocks to emulate the design provided. In a number of cultures, males indeed did better than females on the task; however, in other cultures, females did better than males. Berry et al. (1992) suggested that male superiority on the task tended to be found in cultures that were tight (that is, relatively homogeneous), sedentary, and agriculturally based but that female superiority was found in cultures that were loose, nomadic, and based on hunting and gathering. In these latter cultures, the roles ascribed to males and females are relatively flexible, with more members performing a variety of tasks related to the survival of the group.

Thus, some cultures foster male superiority in these types of tasks, but others foster female superiority, and still others foster no differences. Although some suggestions have been made as to the nature and causes of these various gender differences, research has yet to pinpoint exactly what factors influence which types of differences, and why.

Survival requires that societies balance a number of factors, including natural resources, affluence, and population density. These external factors help to frame and mold specific behaviors that may affect the division of labor between men and women originally necessitated by biological differences. These differential behaviors that occur because of differences in external, environmental factors lead to patterns of behaviors across time that are associated with men and women. This pattern of behaviors across time is culture. In turn, it feeds back reciprocally onto the pattern of behaviors, reinforcing those behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and values. Thus, as different cultures must deal with different external factors, it is only natural that gender differences vary by culture. One culture may foster considerable equality between women and men and relatively few differences in their cultural practices and psychological characteristics. Another culture may foster considerable disparity between the sexes, their cultural practices related to reproduction, and psychological characteristics associated with sex roles. Some cultures may foster differences between the sexes in one direction (for example, males as primary decision makers, females compliant and obedient); another culture may foster differences in the opposite direction. This type of biosocial explanatory model may account for the range of differences obtained in previous cross-cultural research on psychological constructs. Some researchers, in fact, go as far as to say that the persistence of gender stereotypes across culture cannot be attributed to sociocultural factors and can only be explained by sociobiological models (Lueptow, Garovich, & Lueptow, 1995).

CULTURE, GENDER ROLES, AND STEREOTYPES

Culture and Gender Stereotypes

Universality in sex differences in the division of labor described above suggest that gender roles and gender stereotypes may also be universal. We are all familiar with "traditional" gender stereotypes—that males should be independent, self-reliant, strong, and emotionally detached, while women should be dependent, reliant, weak, nurturant, and emotional. To what degree is this an American or Western cultural phenomenon? Several programs of research have examined this interesting question over the years, and have shown that many gender-related stereotypes are, in fact, universally held across cultures.

The best-known study of gender stereotypes across cultures was conducted by Williams and Best (1982), who sampled people in 30 countries, 52–120 respondents per country, for a total of almost 3,000 individuals. The study used a questionnaire known as the Adjective Check List (ACL). The ACL is a list of 300 adjectives. Respondents in each country were asked to decide whether each adjective was considered more descriptive of a male or of a female. Whether the subjects agreed with the assignment of an adjective to males or females was irrelevant; instead they were asked merely to report the characteristics generally associated with males and females in their culture. The researchers tallied the data from all individuals. Looking at responses within each culture, Williams and Best (1982) established the criterion that if more than two-thirds of a sample from a country agreed on a particular term for either males or females, there was a consensus within that culture on that

general characteristic. Then looking at responses across the cultures, the researchers decided that if two-thirds of the cultures reached a consensus on the characteristic, there was cross-cultural consensus on that characteristic as describing males or females. The results indicated a high degree of pancultural agreement across all the countries studied in the characteristics associated with men and women. Table 6.3 lists the 100 items of the pancultural adjective checklist reported by Williams and Best (1994).

Table 6.3 The 100 Items of the Pancultural Adjective Checklist

Male-Associated		Female-Associated	
Active	Loud	Affected	Modest
Adventurous	Obnoxious	Affectionate	Nervous
Aggressive	Opinionated	Appreciative	Patient
Arrogant	Opportunistic	Cautious	Pleasant
Autocratic	Pleasure-seeking	Changeable	Prudish
Bossy	Precise	Charming	Self-pitying
Capable	Progressive	Complaining	Sensitive
Conceited	Rational	Confused	Sexy
Confident	Realistic	Curious	Shy
Courageous	Reckless	Dependent	Softhearted
Cruel	Resourceful	Dreamy	Sophisticated
Cynical	Rigid	Emotional	Submissive
Determined	Robust	Excitable	Suggestible
Disorderly	Serious	Fault-finding	Superstitious
Enterprising	Sharp-witted	Fearful	Talkative
Greedy	Show-off	Fickle	Timid
Hardheaded	Steady	Foolish	Touchy
Humorous	Stern	Forgiving	Unambitious
Indifferent	Stingy	Frivolous	Understanding
Individualistic	Stolid	Fussy	Unintelligent
Initiative	Tough	Gentle	Unstable
Varied interests	Unfriendly	Imaginative	Warm
Inventive	Unscrupulous	Kind	Weak
Lazy	Witty	Mild	Worrying

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The degree of consensus these adjectives received in describing males and females is amazing. Berry and colleagues (1992) suggested "this degree of consensus is so large that it may be appropriate to suggest that the researchers have found a psychological universal when it comes to gender stereotypes" (p. 60). In addition, the possibility of a universally accepted set of gender stereotypes may make sense given the universality in division of labor independently demonstrated by other studies (described above).

Williams and Best (1982) conducted a second type of analysis on their data in order to summarize their major findings. They scored the adjectives in each country in terms of favorability, strength, and activity to examine how the adjectives were distributed according to affective or emotional meaning. They found surprising congruence in these analyses: the characteristics associated with men were stronger and more active than those associated with women across all countries. On favorability, however, cultural differences emerged: Some countries (such as Japan and South Africa) rated the male characteristics as more favorable than the female, whereas other countries (for example, Italy and Peru) rated female characteristics as more favorable.

How are we to interpret these results? It could be that a division of labor for males and females according to reproductive processes produced differences in behaviors that produced differences in psychological characteristics. It may be that these psychological characteristics had some evolutionary and adaptive advantages for males and females to fulfill their roles as prescribed by the division of labor. It could be that men and women in all cultures became set in these precise ways, accounting for universal consensus on these descriptors. At the same time, men and women may have become set in a particular mindset about cultural differences because of perceived social inequality or social forces and indirect communication via mass media and the like. Or these findings could all be a function of the way the research was conducted, using university students as participants, which would tend to make the entire sample more homogeneous than if people were sampled randomly from each culture.

Although it is impossible to disentangle these factors, it is important to note that Williams and Best themselves collected and analyzed data concerning gender stereotypes from young children and found a considerable degree of agreement between the findings for children and those for university students (Williams & Best, 1990). These results argued against (but do not entirely eliminate) the notion that the original findings were due to homogeneity among university students.

Williams and his colleagues extended their earlier work on gender stereotypes in important ways. Williams, Satterwhite, and Best (1999), for example, took the ACL data from 25 countries in their previous work and rescored them in terms of five personality dimensions known as the Big Five, or Five Factor Model of Personality. As you will see in Chapter 9, these terms refer to the five personality traits or dimensions that are considered universal or consistent around the world. They found that males were perceived to have significantly higher scores than females on all traits except agreeableness; females, however, were perceived to have significantly higher scores than males on this personality dimension. They also correlated the sex differences with culture scores from two large value surveys (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994), some demographic variables, and gender ideology scores

from a previous study (Williams & Best, 1990). They found that gender stereotype differentiation tended to be higher in countries that were conservative and hierarchical, with a lower level of socioeconomic development, a relatively low degree of Christian affiliation, and a relatively low proportion of women attending university. Countries that valued harmony and egalitarianism, had less traditional sex-role orientations, and viewed male stereotypes as less favorable than female stereotypes were associated with less gender stereotype differentiation on the five factors.

In summary, this set of studies informs us that gender stereotypes around the world are rather stable, and are related to interesting and important psychological characteristics. Men are generally viewed as active, strong, critical, and adultlike, with psychological needs such as dominance, autonomy, aggression, exhibition, achievement, and endurance. Men are also associated more with the personality traits of conscientiousness, extroversion, and openness. Women are generally viewed as passive, weak, nurturing, and adaptive, with psychological needs such as abasement, deference, succorance, nurturance, affiliation, and heterosexuality. They are also associated with higher scores on the personality traits of agreeableness and neuroticism. As described earlier, the degree of stability of these findings across a wide range of countries and cultures provides a strong base of evidence for some pancultural universality in psychological attribution.

Still many questions remain unanswered in this important area of psychology. How congruent are people's behaviors with their stereotypes, and does this congruence differ across cultures and countries? Are stereotypes related to important psychological constructs or behaviors that affect everyday lives? How do we come to develop such stereotypes—what are the factors that produce them, and their boundaries?

Culture, Gender Role Ideology, and Self-Concept

Another important topic that has been studied across cultures is **gender role ideology**—judgments about what males and females ought to be like or ought to do. To examine gender role ideologies, Williams and Best (1990) asked subjects in 14 countries to complete the ACL in relation to what they believe they are and what they would like to be. Participants also completed a sex role ideology scale that generated scores between two polar opposites labeled "traditional" and "egalitarian." The traditional scores tended to describe gender roles that were consistent with the traditional or universal norms found in their earlier research; egalitarian scores reflected a tendency toward less differentiation between males and females on the various psychological characteristics. The most egalitarian scores were found in the Netherlands, Germany, and Finland; the most traditional ideologies were found in Nigeria, Pakistan, and India. Women tended to have more egalitarian views than men. Gender differences within each country were relatively small compared to cross-country differences, which were considerable. In particular, countries with relatively high socioeconomic development, a high proportion of Protestant Christians, a low proportion of Muslims, a high percentage of women employed outside the home, a high proportion of women enrolled in universities,

and a greater degree of individualism were associated with more egalitarian scores. These findings make sense, as greater affluence and individualistic tendencies tend to produce a culture that allows women increased access to jobs and education, thus blending traditional gender roles.

Williams and Best (1990) also examined gender differences in self-concept. The same students in the same 14 countries rated each of the 300 adjectives of the ACL according to whether it was descriptive of themselves or their ideal self. Responses were scored according to masculinity/femininity as well as in terms of favorability, strength, and activity. When scored according to masculinity/femininity both self and ideal-self ratings for men were more masculine than were women's ratings, and vice versa, across all countries. However, both men and women in all countries rated their ideal self as more masculine than their actual self. In effect, they were saying that they wanted to have more of the traits traditionally associated with males.

Gender role ideologies have also been studied in younger populations by Gibbons and her colleagues (de Silva, Stiles, & Gibbons, 1992; Gibbons, Bradford, & Stiles, 1989; Gibbons, Stiles, Schnellman, & Morales-Hidalgo, 1990; Stiles, Gibbons, & Schnellman, 1990). These researchers conducted several cross-cultural studies involving almost 700 adolescents ranging in age from 11 to 17 years from Spain, Guatemala, and Sri Lanka. In their surveys, adolescents were asked to draw and describe characteristics of the ideal man or woman. Interestingly, the most important quality in these countries for both boys and girls was being "kind and honest," a characteristic that was not gender-specific. Some gender differences emerged, however, with being good-looking more often mentioned as an ideal for women and being employed in a job as more of an ideal for men.

Gibbons conducted another study on adolescents' attitudes toward gender roles that involved 265 international students, ages 11 to 17, who attended school in the Netherlands. Students completed an Attitude Towards Women Scale for Adolescents (Galambos, Petersen, Richards, & Gitelson, 1985) that included 12 statements such as "Boys are better than girls" and "Girls should have the same freedom as boys." Adolescents were asked to report their level of agreement with these statements. Their feelings: girls were less traditional than boys and adolescents from wealthier and more individualistic countries were less traditional than adolescents from poorer and more collectivist countries (Gibbons, Stiles, & Shkodriani, 1991).

Gibbons's study of Sri Lankan adolescents (de Silva et al., 1992) indicated that gender role ideologies may be changing as societies undergo change. She found that more than half the girls in her study depicted the ideal woman as being employed outside the home even though the traditional role of a Sri Lankan woman was that of homemaker. Mule and Barthel (1992) describe social change in Egypt, where there has been an increase in women's participation in the workforce and, to some extent, political life. Furthermore, globalization and exposure to Western culture have presented this traditionally Islamic country with alternative gender ideologies. Subsequently, gender role ideologies may undergo modification or redefinition in these countries as Eastern and Western influences continue to combine.

Nonetheless, maintaining, not modifying, traditional gender roles in the face of modernization is also likely. For instance, a study of Palestinian women and their families found that one's level of education, participation in political activities, and

employment are not major factors predicting more egalitarian family roles (Huntington, Fronk, & Chadwick, 2001). The authors were surprised by this finding and argued that cultural values defined by Islamic beliefs and practices are resisting the forces of modernity. In other words, Islamic teachings on women, the family, and relationships between men and women may be a powerful influence in maintaining traditional family functioning, and especially traditional ideas of women's roles in family and society. These findings highlight the important role of religion in understanding how gender role ideologies are defined and preserved in different cultures.

Ethnicity and Gender Roles

Research within cultures also points to important differences in gender roles, especially among different ethnic groups. Some research, for instance, has suggested that the gender identities of African Americans are more androgynous than those of European Americans. **Androgyny** refers to a gender identity that involves endorsement of both male and female characteristics. Harris (1996), for example, administered the Bem Sex Role Inventory, a scale that is widely used to measure gender identity, to African and European American males and females, and found that both African American males and females were more androgynous than European American males and females. In addition, he found that African American males and females have an equal propensity to endorse typically masculine traits, whereas European American males regard more masculine traits as self-descriptive than European American females do. Other studies conducted in the United States (Frome & Eccles, 1996), Israel (Orr & Ben-Eliahu, 1993), and Hong Kong (Lau, 1989) have found that adolescent girls who adopt an androgynous identity have higher levels of self-acceptance than either feminine or masculine girls. For boys, however, a masculine, not androgynous, identity is associated with the highest level of self-acceptance.

Many Asian American families have carried on traditional gender roles associated with males and females from their original culture. Asian females are often expected to bear the brunt of domestic duties, to raise children, and to be "good" daughters-in-law. Asian American males are often raised to remain aloof, unemotional, and authoritative, especially concerning familial issues (D. Sue, 1998). Some studies, however, have suggested a loosening of these rigid, traditional gender roles for Asian American males and females. Although Asian American males may still appear as the figurative head of the family in public, in reality, much decision-making power within the family in private is held by the Asian American female head of the household (Huang & Ying, 1989).

The traditional role of the Mexican American female was to provide for the children and take care of the home (Comas-Diaz, 1992). Likewise, Mexican American males were traditionally expected to fill the role of provider for the family. These differences are related to the concept of **machismo**, which incorporates many traditional expectations of the male gender role, such as being unemotional, strong, authoritative, and aggressive. However, research has shown that these gender differences for Mexican American males and females are also on the decrease. Mexican American women are increasingly sharing in decision making in the family,

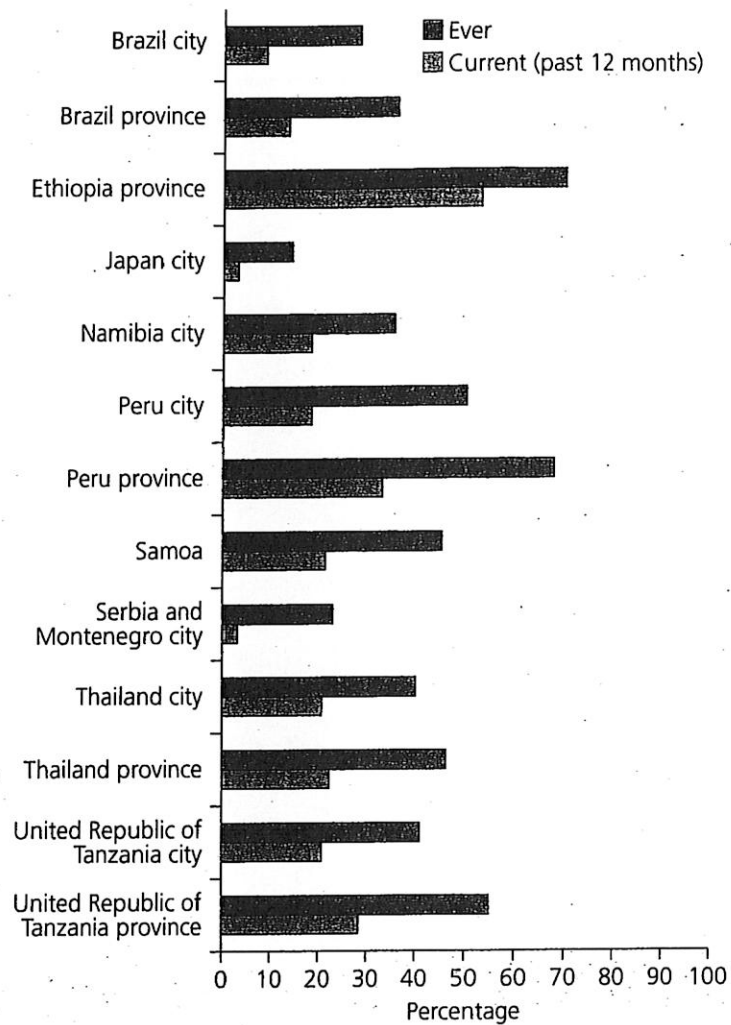
as well as taking on a more direct role as provider through work outside the home (Espin, 1993). Although adolescent Mexican American males are generally still given more freedom outside the home than are females, gender differences may be decreasing in the contemporary Mexican American family. This is likely to continue as increasing numbers of Latina women are employed and an emerging Latina feminist movement takes hold (Espin, 1997). It is important to note, however, that this movement continues to place high value on the traditional role of wife and mother, yet offers a wider interpretation of roles acceptable for Latinas.

Gender role differentiation for Native Americans seems to depend heavily on the patriarchal or matriarchal nature of the tribal culture of origin. In patriarchal tribes, women assume primary responsibility for the welfare of the children and extended family members. But males of the Mescalero Apache tribe often take responsibility for children when they are with their families (Glover, 2001). As with other ethnic groups, the passage of time, increased interaction with people of other cultures and with mainstream American culture, and the movement toward urban living seems to have effected changes in these traditional values and expectations for Native American males and females.

CHANGING CULTURES, CHANGING GENDER ROLES

The 191 members of the United Nations have committed to creating sustainable human development and to recognizing equal rights and opportunities for men and women that are critical for social and economic progress. Tragically, one of the obstacles to this progress concerns violence against women, which is a concrete manifestation of inequality between males and females. A few years ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported the results of a study involving over 24,000 interviews with women from 15 sites in 10 countries (Garcia-Moreno, Heise, Jansen, Ellsberg, & Watts, 2005). In 13 of the 15 sites, between 35 and 76% of the women had reported being physically or sexually assaulted by someone else since the age of 15. In all settings but one, the majority of the violence was perpetrated by a current or previous partner, not a stranger. Overall, 15 to 71% of the women who ever had a partner had been physically or sexually assaulted. In most settings, almost half of the respondents reported that the violence was currently ongoing (see Figure 6.3). There was substantial variation both within and between countries, and findings indicated that women in industrialized countries may find it easier to leave abusive relationships.

These kinds of findings make it strikingly clear that despite desires for equality, inequality still persists quite strongly around the world. This, coupled with the fact that cultures are always in flux, and that cultures clash because of increased contact of peoples of different worldviews brings many of the issues discussed in this chapter to the forefront of numerous people's lives. In many cases, they represent an interesting and complex interplay between culture, psychology, and law (Shweder, Minow, & Markus, 2002). In Europe, for instance, debates occur concerning hymenoplasty, a surgical procedure that replaces a woman's hymen. Because the hymen usually breaks in the first act of intercourse, its restoration allows women who have had sex to appear as if they are virgins. This is particularly important for some women in some cultures, such as traditional Muslim



Note: Bangladesh data not included.

Figure 6.3 Percentage of Ever-Partnered Women Reporting Physical or Sexual Violence, or Both, by an Intimate Partner, by Site

Source: Garcia-Moreno, C., Heise, L., Jansen, H. A. F. M., Ellsberg, M., & Watts, C. (2005). Violence against women. *Science*, 310, 1282–1283.

culture, which values virginity in marriage partners. Many young Muslim women are caught between the freedoms that American or European societies and cultures offer and the deep-rooted traditions of their families generations, and many seek certificates of virginity to provide proof to family and prospective marriage partners.

In many cultures, the preference for one sex over the other is also very apparent and strong. In many Muslim and Asian cultures, for example, boys are prized

and girls are not. Thus the differential treatment of boys and girls happens immediately at birth. In Afghanistan, some families even go as far as to dress up their girls to masquerade as boys and send them off to school. The reasons for this include economic need, social pressure to have sons, and in some cases a superstition that doing so can lead to the birth of a real boy.

These aspects of clashing cultures exist in the U.S. as well. For instance, among the most pressing issues and concerns facing the United States today are gender differences across different ethnicities and the continuing struggle for gender equity across all cultural and ethnic groups. Just as people in different cultures in faraway lands may have different gender roles and expectations, people of different ethnic backgrounds in the United States can have different gender role expectations as well. Many of these gender differences across ethnic lines are rooted in the cultures people of these ethnicities brought with them when they originally came to the United States. Gender differences in the United States today, along with this melting pot effect, produce a uniquely "American" influence and reflect gender issues in a uniquely American way.

How is one to deal with the social isolation, physical beating, and even murder of young women that would be justified in another culture because of perceived dishonor brought about by premarital sex? What should be the response of communities and societies toward female genital mutilation, especially when condoned by the operators and recipients? How can democracies deal with acts that they condemn in their laws while at the same time being open and embracing of cultural differences? These are tough questions that all of us have to face in today's pluralistic world.

Clearly, as we have mentioned throughout this book, culture is not a static entity; it is dynamic and ever changing. Cultural changes are brought about by many factors, especially economic. Witness the great cultural changes that are occurring in many countries of the world since the end of World War II. Japan, for instance, was decimated at the end of that war; yet, today it stands as one of the world's economic powers. Such changes bring with them a major shift in the culture of the society, and we are witness to such shifts in Japan today (Matsumoto, 2002a). Similar changes are occurring or have occurred in many other cultures as well, including South Korea and China.

Much of the cultural changes that are brought by economics give rise to tensions between tradition and progress, conservatism and liberalism. Images capture these tensions: watching young women in Japan dressed in traditional Japanese *kimono* as they observe a centuries-old tradition of coming-of-age (*seijin-shiki*), as they talk on their cell phones and instant message with friends, as they ride the fastest trains in the world, produce a stark contrast between tradition and progress. Similarly, young adults in the Middle East may, on one hand, condemn the U.S. yet, on the other, be willing to obtain a visa and immigrate to the U.S.

Changing and clashing cultures bring about many confrontations between gender differences across culture. Changing culture around the world, for example, that is associated with increased economic power, affluence, and individualism is associated with changing gender roles. More women work outside the home, are more economically independent, and have a greater say at home and at work. Yet there are social consequences of such cultural changes; in such cultures, divorce rates increase (Matsumoto, 2002a; Yodanis, 2005); the amount and type of health

related problems for women increase, such as rising incidence of cardiovascular problems, alcoholism, and rates of smoking (Allamani, Voller, Kubicka, & Bloomfield, 2000). Changes in culture, therefore, have both positive and negative consequences, and full consideration should be given before weighing in on the pros and cons of such changes.

CONCLUSION

Sex refers to the biological and physiological differences between males and females. *Sex roles* are behaviors expected of males and females in relation to their biological differences and reproduction. *Gender* refers to the psychological and behavioral traits and characteristics cultures carve out using sex differences as a base. *Gender roles* refer to the degree to which a person adopts the gender-specific behaviors ascribed by his or her culture. Gender and its permutations—roles, identities, stereotypes, and the like—share an important link with culture.

Gender roles are different for males and females in all cultures. Some stereotypic notions about gender differences seem to be universal across cultures such as aggressiveness, strength, and lack of emotionality for males and weakness, submissiveness, and emotionality for females. Other research, however, has shown that the degree, and in some case the direction, of these differences varies across cultures. That is, not every culture will necessarily harbor the same gender differences in the same way as other cultures. Further research is needed to gain a better understanding of culture-constant and culture-specific aspects of gender differences.

Examining gender differences in the United States is especially challenging because of the cultural and ethnic diversity within this single country and the influence of interactions with mainstream American culture. Each ethnic group has its own cultural preferences for gender differentiation, but some blending of the old with the new, the traditional with the modern, appears to be taking place. Without evidence to the contrary, it is probably best to consider this blending as an addition of cultural repertoires concerning gender differences rather than a subtraction from the old ways.

As we meet people from different cultural backgrounds, we may encounter gender roles that are different from our own. Often we feel strongly and negatively about these differences. Yet despite our own personal outlook, we must exercise considerable care and caution in imposing our preferences on others. In most cases, people of other cultures feel just as strongly about their own way of living. Many people of many other cultures, men and women, still harbor many of the traditional values of their ancestral culture, and we have seen conflicts arise because some—men and women alike—look down on these traditional ways, criticize them, and attempt to force change. Many women in many cultures want to marry early, stay home, and take care of the family; many men want to adopt the traditional male roles as well. These tendencies are alive in many different people within the most egalitarian cultures and societies. We need to respect these differences rather than attempt to change them because they are not consonant with our own individual or cultural preferences. Nonetheless, this is a delicate balancing act for all of us because there is a fine line between cultural relativity (a desired state of comprehension) and the unacceptable justification of oppression.