

CHAPTER 1

Sex, Gender, and Work

On the Psychology of Sex

There is perhaps no field aspiring to be scientific where flagrant personal bias, logic martyred in the cause of supporting a prejudice, unfounded assertions, and even sentimental rot and drivel, have run riot to such an extent as here.¹

Psychologists love dichotomies. There are always two kinds of people.²

Our story begins from a pithy word from the first psychologist to undertake an extensive and systematic examination of the psychological characteristics of the sexes.³ In 1910, Helen Thompson Woolley issued a stinging indictment of research about the topic of sex differences that is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Since then, thousands of studies on the topic of have been published by scholars around the world. Has anything changed?

One century later, Susan Fiske, a prominent modern-day psychologist, offered the humorous take on psychologists who conduct research about sex differences that appears in the second quote above. When psychologists consider the characteristics of two groups such as men and women, they tend to view members of the two groups as opposite in traits. This tendency in turn influences the psychologists' research, including the topics studied, the labels assigned to traits, and the interpretation of results and conclusions reached. It is also exhibited in popular conceptions of how the sexes differ. For example, John Gray's best-selling book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, asserted

that women and men are so different in personal traits that they might as well be from different planets. Not all people agree; on a Web site titled *The Rebuttal from Uranus*, Susan Hamson slammed Gray's book as "a sexist, patronizing, male-centered invective which does little more than perpetuate long-held negative gender stereotypes." However, even if psychologists and other observers are predisposed to believe that sex differences in personal traits are prevalent, this does not necessarily mean that sex differences are absent. Moreover, even if sex differences in personal traits that men and women bring to the workplace are minimal, their experiences in the workplace may differ dramatically.⁴

Women and Men in Management, Fourth Edition, examines the evolving roles and experiences of women and men in the global workplace. Significant changes have occurred over the last half-century in the status of women and men and in their interactions at work. However, sharply different views have been offered about the implications of these changes for the workplace of the future. Some believe that all of the needed changes have taken place and remaining sex-based inequalities in the workplace will continue to erode. According to an **optimistic view** of trends toward gender equality, the inevitable consequence of egalitarian values among parents to provide their daughters and sons with similar opportunities, among citizens to support legal interventions such as antidiscrimination laws and requirements for family leaves, and among organizations to offer women-friendly programs such as on-site child care will be equal opportunities and pay for women and men. In short, the day will come when a person's sex no longer matters at work.⁵

However, others believe that needed changes have stalled and remaining sex-based inequalities are now entrenched. According to a **pessimistic view**, although men are doing more housework, they are not exactly embracing the opportunity to take on equal responsibility with their female partners for child care and other household demands. Also, although women have sought access to male-intensive occupations (those in which two thirds or more of the workforce is male) in greater numbers, fewer men have sought access to female-intensive occupations (those in which two thirds or more of the workforce is female). Further, the legal requirement of equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace is not equivalent to a societal commitment to ensure that they will be similarly oriented to take advantage of such opportunities. Although we do not know whether the future will offer greater support for the optimistic or pessimistic view, the evidence about the present state of affairs in the workplace offers a more mixed picture.

The role of women in the workplace has been expanding steadily worldwide. In the United States, the proportion of women in the labor force (i.e., the proportion of all adults employed or seeking employment who are women), which was 42% in 1980, has risen to 47%. This proportion varies widely across countries, for example, 14% in Saudi Arabia, 27% in Morocco, 37% in Chile, and 48% in Finland. However, the trend in almost all countries has been in the same direction, toward the increased employment of women. Similarly, although the proportion of women in management in different countries varies widely due to differences in national culture and definitions of the term *manager*, the trend in almost all countries has been toward the increased representation of women in the managerial ranks.⁶

Despite these trends, female managers are concentrated in the lower management levels and hold positions with less authority than men. The higher the level of the organization, the fewer women are found. Although definitions of what constitutes “top management” vary among companies, the proportion of female executive officers, typically considered as top management, is only 14% in *Fortune* 500 corporations and less than 5% in many nations. Women are also underrepresented in corporate boards, consisting of 15% of board directors in *Fortune* 500 corporations (the 500 highest-grossing closely held and public U.S. corporations), 12% of board directors in FTSE 100 companies (the 100 most highly capitalized United Kingdom companies listed on the London Stock Exchange), and about 10% of board directors in the largest companies listed on the national stock exchange of European Union member states. Around the world, a **glass ceiling** appears to restrict women’s access to top management positions solely because they are women. Women are not allowed to advance in managerial hierarchies as far as men with equivalent credentials.⁷

The economic status of women in the workplace remains lower than that of men. The average female full-time worker continues to be paid less than the average male full-time worker. This gap is partly due to the lower average wages of workers in female-intensive occupations than that of workers in male-intensive occupations. Also, women are paid less than men in the same occupation and often in the same job. The ratio of female-to-male wages for similar work is below 100% in all nations for which the World Economic Forum reports data, with the highest value for Uzbekistan (83%) and the lowest value for Bolivia (45%); the ratio for the United States is 67%, ranking 64th out of 125 nations.⁸

The global labor force also remains sharply segregated on the basis of sex. In recent years, women have shown more interest in entering male-intensive occupations than men have shown in entering female-intensive

occupations, which is not surprising because workers in male-intensive occupations are the higher paid. However, women continue to be crowded into a lower-paying set of occupations than are men.⁹

Thus, differences in workplace status according to biological sex remain strong, even though there have been considerable changes. Is it only a matter of time until the proportions of women and men in all managerial levels and all occupations become essentially equal, until women and men are paid equal wages for equal work, and until individuals' work experiences are unaffected by their biological sex? As we shall see, it will depend on actions that organizations and individuals take.

Sex Versus Gender

In this book, we make a distinction between two frequently used terms: *sex* and *gender*. The term *sex* (or biological sex) refers to the binary categories of male and female, which are determined by biological characteristics of individuals such as their physiological properties and reproductive apparatus. The term *gender* refers to the psychosocial implications of being male or female, such as beliefs and expectations about what kinds of attitudes, behaviors, skills, values and interests are more appropriate for or typical of one sex than the other. Thus, gender is a term used in a social context to refer to the role associated with being male or female.¹⁰

The study of **sex differences** examines how males and females actually differ. In contrast, the study of **gender differences** focuses on how people believe that males and females differ. For example, a sex difference in leadership style would exist if female leaders were more considerate of their subordinates than were male leaders. There would be a gender difference in leadership style if people believed that female leaders were more considerate of their subordinates than were male leaders. However, there could be a gender difference in leadership style without a corresponding sex difference, and vice versa. Furthermore, gender differences can *cause* sex differences. For example, if parents believe that the developmental needs of their sons differ from those of their daughters, they may raise their children in ways that reinforce that belief. In the same vein, if supervisors believe that the skills and interests of their female and male subordinates differ, they may assign tasks to their subordinates in ways that reinforce that belief. In each case, the result is a **self-fulfilling prophecy**—when expectations cause behavior that makes the expectations come true. We identify many workplace situations in which self-fulfilling prophecies are likely to occur.¹¹

As we consider the effects of sex differences on work-related behavior, we also need to consider the effects of gender differences. Sex differences influence how people are disposed to behave in work settings. Gender differences influence how people react to others' behavior in such settings. Gender differences are manifested in stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. A **stereotype** is a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people. Stereotyping is a cognitive activity, related to thinking, learning, and remembering distinctions between various groups of people. In contrast, people who display **prejudice**, or a negative attitude toward members of other groups, are engaging in an emotional activity. Finally, **discrimination**, a behavioral activity, is exhibited in how people treat members of other groups and in the decisions they make about others. We have reason to be concerned about all three of these phenomena. All of us may be targets of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. In addition, we may engage in stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.¹²

Dimensions of Diversity

Sex represents only one of many personal characteristics that may influence individuals' experiences in the workplace. People differ in many ways, some of which are changeable, others less amenable to change. **Primary dimensions of diversity** are essentially unchangeable personal characteristics that exert significant lifelong impacts. Sex is a primary dimension of diversity, along with race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and physical abilities/disabilities. Together, primary dimensions of diversity shape our basic self-image and sense of identity. They affect our early learning experiences, and there is typically no escaping their impact throughout the course of our lives.¹³

Secondary dimensions of diversity, on the other hand, are changeable personal characteristics. These characteristics are acquired and may be modified or abandoned throughout life. Education, income, marital and parental status, religion, political affiliation, and work experience are some secondary dimensions of diversity of importance to many people. People also distinguish themselves in many other ways, such as in their choices of collegiate fraternities or sororities, hobbies, activities, voluntary associations, clothing and grooming style, and music preferences. Of course, a person does not completely determine his or her secondary characteristics. For instance, educational background, work experience,

income, or marital status will be affected by other people's decisions. However, people generally have more control over the secondary dimensions of diversity in their lives than over the primary dimensions of diversity.

The primary dimensions of diversity may fall into different categories, including whether group membership is visible and whether it is regarded as changeable. For example, sexual orientation is not necessarily observable and opinions differ as to whether it is changeable. As a result, gays and lesbians face decisions about "coming out." They may decide to disclose their sexual orientation to family members and friends on a person-to-person basis based on the level of trust in the relationship and the anticipated reaction to the disclosure. However, they are unlikely to disclose their sexual orientation to coworkers if they perceive or fear workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.¹⁴

In contrast, sex is highly visible and not easily changed. People have little choice about "coming out" as female or male. The psychologist Sandra Bem once asked audience members if they had ever known anyone personally without noticing that person's sex. Few could answer yes. Sex is an important characteristic to most people when forming their impression of someone. Even if sex is not important to a particular person's own sense of identity, other people may be influenced by their beliefs and expectations associated with that person's sex.

Thus, people categorize themselves and may be categorized by others along many different dimensions of diversity, both primary and secondary. The focus of this book is the influence of categorizations of people according to sex on what transpires in the workplace. However, sex is not isolated from other dimensions of diversity. The effect of sex on how people develop their senses of identity and on how they are treated in the workplace cannot be separated from the effects of race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, physical abilities/disabilities, and various secondary dimensions of diversity.

Researchers often ignore the interdependence of sex and other dimensions of diversity. For example, many studies of sex or gender differences have not reported the racial or ethnic group of the individuals who were the focus of the study. By ignoring issues of race and ethnicity, such studies reflect an underlying assumption that sex and gender differences are similar across all racial and ethnic groups. That is, White women, Black women, Hispanic women, Asian women, and women of other racial and ethnic groups are assumed to have similar personal characteristics and experiences, as are White men, Black men, Hispanic

men, Asian men, and so on. We need to guard against making such assumptions ourselves.¹⁵

In addition, people often compare the effects of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination on the basis of different dimensions of diversity and offer conclusions about which “ism” (e.g., sexism, racism, ageism, heterosexism) has worse consequences. For example, Hillary Clinton, a White woman, and Barack Obama, a man often characterized as Black although he is of mixed race, were leading contenders for the nomination of the Democratic Party for the U.S. presidency in the 2008 election; Obama won the nomination and subsequent election. During the campaign, considerable debate took place in the media over which candidate was subject to greater discrimination, Clinton on the basis of sex or Obama on the basis of race. Clinton was the target of sexism in comments about her display of emotions, whereas Obama was the target of racism in comments about his Muslim-sounding middle name, Hussein. Gloria Steinem, a prominent feminist, argued that sexism trumped racism in the campaign to the disadvantage of Clinton, asserting that “gender is probably the most restricting force in American life, whether the question is who must be in the kitchen or who could be in the White House.” However, Obama faced a challenge in handling issues of both gender and race; a political observer noted, “As a Black man, he must be careful not to appear too hostile toward a White woman.”¹⁶

Although the comparison of sexism and racism in media accounts of the Clinton–Obama contest may have educated some people about the kinds of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination that may occur, it oversimplified the complex issues involved. It seems more reasonable to acknowledge that sex, race, and a host of other dimensions of diversity may be used as the basis for stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. We need to guard against all “isms” in the workplace and not be distracted by comparisons of their strength.

Watching Out for Biases

People have strong beliefs about whether there are fundamental differences between the capabilities of females and males. In fact, speculation about such differences is a universal phenomenon. People seldom wonder whether children who differ in eye color or height also differ in personality, behavioral tendencies, or intellectual abilities. However, they do care if there are such differences between girls and boys.¹⁷

Researchers may bring either of two types of bias to the study of sex differences, alpha bias and beta bias. **Alpha bias** consists of the tendency to exaggerate sex differences. **Beta bias** consists of the tendency to minimize or ignore sex differences. Either type of bias can lead to a distortion of how the researcher sees reality.¹⁸

Such biases may be the result of the personal prejudices of researchers. If the researcher's goal is to prove that traditional stereotypes of the sexes are inaccurate and that females and males are essentially equivalent in their personalities, behavioral tendencies, and intellectual abilities, he or she is likely to demonstrate beta bias by concluding that any sex differences that are found are trivial. On the other hand, if the researcher's goal is to prove that one sex is superior to the other in some way or to justify a status quo in which women and men are seen as naturally suited to different roles and thereby deserving of different treatment, he or she is likely to demonstrate alpha bias by concluding that sex differences in personal characteristics are large and fundamental to human functioning.¹⁹

Also, as Susan Fiske suggested in the opening quote, the mere presence of a two-category system leads psychologists as well as other people to view the two categories as opposites. For example, parents with two children tend to describe each in contrast to the other (e.g., "Tom is more of a leader and Joe is more of a follower"). However, parents with three or more children tend to focus on the unique aspects of each child (e.g., "Kristin enjoys rooting for her favorite baseball team, Melissa likes to produce school plays, Rob likes camping, Will enjoys music and photography, and Nate likes to bang the drums"). Similarly, anthropologists who have done fieldwork in only two cultures tend to emphasize the differences between these cultures, whereas anthropologists with wider field experience are more aware of the diversity of human experience. The same phenomenon may occur for sex. Because there are only two categories, no one has the opportunity to gain "wider field experience" with a third or fourth sex. As a result, people tend to focus on the differences between males and females, thereby reinforcing alpha bias. Also, every researcher of sex differences belongs to one of the two groups being examined. Researchers may be more likely to report sex differences that reflect favorably on members of their own sex. Moreover, the popular media exhibit alpha bias in their choice of which research results to publicize. Findings of sex differences are glamorized and magnified, whereas findings of sex similarities receive much less media attention.²⁰

Overall, it seems realistic to expect that some sex differences will be small to nonexistent, others will be moderate, and still others will be large. However, we need to be aware of the possibility of biases, both in researchers and in media accounts of research on sex differences, that affect what research findings are reported and how they are interpreted. We also need to guard against two dangerous assumptions that may be made about the results of research. First, if a sex difference is found in some aspect of human behavior, this does not mean that all males do something and all females do something quite different. Second, sex differences that are found are not necessarily biologically based and therefore automatically present and not subject to change. Indeed, the behavior of the sexes is highly subject to social influences, as we shall see throughout the book.²¹

Organization of the Book

The book begins its analysis of the transition in female/male work relationships by looking back in time. Chapter 2 considers the evolution of women's and men's work roles during the 20th century. It examines the effects of historical influences such as the occurrence of two major world wars, the passage of equal employment opportunity laws, and the development of a women's liberation movement. The current status of women and men in today's workforce is described in terms of sex differences in labor force participation, occupation, and pay.

Chapter 3 examines sex and gender differences that affect the behavior of women and men in the workplace. This chapter reviews some of the major findings of psychological research on sex differences. Key concepts such as gender stereotypes, gender roles, sexism, and gender identity that are critical to understanding male/female interactions are introduced. The ways in which parents, schools, and the mass media convey gender role expectations to children, as well as the limitations of strict adherence to gender roles in adults, are explored.

Chapter 4, coauthored with Laura Graves, considers how individuals and organizations make decisions about establishing employment relationships. For individuals, these decisions entail choosing which job opportunities to pursue and which job offers to accept; for organizations, they entail choosing which applicants to hire. The chapter describes how differences in men's and women's job search strategies and reactions to specific jobs and organizations lead them to seek and obtain very different

employment opportunities. It also examines sex discrimination in organizations' hiring decisions, including how and when sex discrimination occurs and who discriminates against whom. Recommendations are offered for reducing sex and gender effects on the employment decisions of individuals and organizations.

Chapter 5, also coauthored with Laura Graves, considers the effects of sex and gender on behavior in diverse teams. The chapter analyzes differences in how men and women behave and are evaluated in mixed-sex teams. It also examines how the sex composition of the team influences the experiences of male and female team members and the team's effectiveness. It suggests that mixed-sex teams are susceptible to a host of problems, the severity of which depends on a number of situational factors. The chapter concludes with recommendations for actions that team members and leaders may take to facilitate the functioning of mixed-sex teams.

Chapter 6 examines the effects of leader preferences, leader and gender stereotypes, and attitudes toward female leaders on how leadership is exhibited in organizations. Despite the increased proportion of women in management, people who express a choice still prefer to have a male boss, and stereotypes continue to reflect the beliefs of "think manager—think male" and "think manager—think masculine." Sex differences in actual leader behavior and effectiveness are examined to determine whether there is any basis to these stereotypes. The chapter concludes that, contrary to leader stereotypes, women may actually be better prepared to handle managerial roles in today's work environment. Organizations are urged to take actions to ensure that capable leaders of both sexes have equal chances to succeed.

Chapter 7 explores issues pertaining to the expression of sexuality in the workplace, which includes sexual harassment (unwelcome sexual attention directed toward others) and workplace romances (mutually desired relationships between two people at work). It examines the causes and consequences of both types of sexually oriented behavior. Actions are recommended for both organizations and individuals to deal with sexual harassment and to minimize the disruption caused by workplace romances.

Chapter 8 considers what it takes for individuals to achieve a sense of work–family balance, whatever their family structure may be; even single employees are likely to have a family life that is important to them. It examines the increasing diversity of family structures. It describes how individuals' experiences of the work–family interface may be both positive and negative at different times and in different ways, depending on

the extent to which they segment or integrate these two roles. It examines sex differences in how people define and measure “success,” including the paradox that women and men are similarly satisfied with their careers despite the fact that men’s careers appear to be the more successful in objective terms. It reviews sex differences in how family factors influence important work decisions. The chapter concludes with actions that organizations may take to enhance employees’ work–family balance as well as actions that individuals may take on their own behalf.

Chapters 1 through 8 identify numerous issues related to sex and gender that arise in today’s workplace. Chapter 9 offers solutions to these problems. It details the relevant laws and regulations with which organizations must comply to avoid discrimination. The chapter presents the business case for going beyond legal compliance to promote diversity (i.e., representation of members of different groups in all jobs and levels) and inclusion (i.e., acceptance of members of all groups in the organizational culture). Actions are outlined for organizations to achieve nondiscriminatory, diverse, and inclusive cultures.

In summary, *Women and Men in Management, Fourth Edition*, covers a wide range of topics. It describes female and male work roles in the past and the present. The effects of sex and gender on childhood development and adult behavior are considered. It examines how sex and gender influence individuals’ experiences as job candidates, team members, and managers. Issues associated with the expression of sexuality in the workplace are explored. Finally, this book offers concrete recommendations for individuals and organizations to ensure that all people feel successful according to their own definition of success, regardless of their biological sex.

Notes

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