CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

• define some key concepts in the psychology of gender
• differentiate between a variety of different sexual orientations
• identify the ways in which psychology has approached gender/sex differences
• construct accounts of gender development in childhood by discussing the basic views of each theory
• explain the differences between an essentialist and a social constructionist approach to gender
• explain how gender inequality is often expressed in violence against women
• describe the rise of feminism and the corresponding emergence of a new understanding of masculinity.

CASE STUDY

Nosipho saw herself as a feminist because she believed in the fair and equal treatment of women and girls. She had grown up in quite a traditional household where, even though her father had treated her mother with respect, if ever there was any difference of opinion, her father’s decision was final. Fortunately, her father was a kind and gentle man so this had not been the problem it might have been. But Nosipho had seen many families where the father bullied his wife, and the children too. Everyone in her community knew of homes where the wife was being beaten by her husband – even if they didn’t say it openly. When Nosipho and her mother discussed these kinds of things, they both felt angry on behalf of the women, but they also felt helpless to do anything about it. It seemed to Nosipho that many of the things that went wrong in families had to do with the way that men and women related to each other.

Nosipho had often tried to make sense of the problems she saw between men and women. Why did men seem so aggressive and why did women so often land up being treated badly? Nosipho had found herself sometimes wondering about how different men and women seemed from one another and what had made them that way. Were they just born different or did their society and culture force them into these gender roles? She also wondered if these problems could ever change; perhaps some of them already had? Sometimes, for example, it seemed to Nosipho that the men in her generation were less afraid of showing their softer feelings and that the women were often more assertive than their mothers had been. Had others observed these improvements? And what other changes needed to be made?

Introduction

In order to address the kinds of questions Nosipho asks, we need to examine some of the concepts and theories scholars have developed to understand gender. We begin by defining sex, gender, sexuality and sexual orientation. We review the main psychological theories that account for gender/sex differences. Through our discussion of biological accounts, psychoanalytic theory, social learning theory, cognitive developmental approaches, gender schema theory and social constructionism, we explore the key concepts in the study of gender. These include the performance of gender (or doing gender), gender stereotypes, socialisation, gender constancy and androgyny. In the second part of the chapter, we focus on gender in society by highlighting some of
the challenges to gender equity and the ways in which the sources of gender inequality have been theorised. We discuss feminism and consider the social, economic and historical factors that have affected the various strands of feminism. We end the chapter by showing how, despite earlier critiques, psychology has made a positive contribution to the study of gender.

When we talk about sex differences between people, we are referring to their biological differences in chromosomes, hormones and genital organs. However, sex classification is also a social process. According to West and Zimmerman (2009), the biological characteristics to which we refer are socially agreed upon criteria which make up the sex classification system. In this system, people who fit into certain criteria are classified as female and people who fit other criteria are male. However, there are problems with this binary model of sexuality (Tomsen, 2009). First, there may be variations in hormone levels and external genitalia (see Box 19.1). Second, there are serious social implications if a person defines him-/herself outside of these heterosexual categories as this may lead to exclusion, harassment or even violence (Tomsen, 2009).

On the other hand, gender is commonly understood to refer to the characteristics (masculine or feminine) that a society or culture assigns to a person on the basis of their sex. For example, in many contemporary societies, when a female baby is born, she is often dressed in pink and as she grows up, she is expected to behave differently from her brothers, for example by being quieter, gentler and more concerned with her appearance. How people respond to her biological characteristics and the demands people make on her to behave in certain ways are her culture’s expression of gender.

Although there is no natural or innate link between sex and gender, we can observe how closely the two are associated. Those people who have a female baby and then dress her in pink and expect her to behave in feminine ways, are combining sex and gender into one. They are assuming that sex determines gender and that the two are inseparable. In some cases, the terms are (incorrectly) used interchangeably. For example, in the case of South African athlete, Caster Semenya (see Box 19.2), most news reports referred to the decision for her to undergo gender testing. However this was incorrect terminology, as the testing was to determine Semenya’s biological sex so that a decision could be made about her competing in women’s sporting events. It is essential that the difference between the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ is clearly understood.

Biologically, sexuality includes sexual behaviours which may also have associated ethical elements. However, for this chapter, sexuality will be defined as the way people experience and express their sexual feelings. There are variations in how or where people direct their sexual interest and this is usually referred to as their sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is often thought to exist along a continuum between exclusive interest in someone of the other sex and exclusive interest in someone of the same sex. Some categories for sexual orientation along this continuum are: a heterosexual person is attracted to someone of the other sex, a homosexual person to the same sex, a bisexual person to both sexes, and an asexual person may have no interest in sex. Asexuality is not the same as celibacy, which is when a person has committed themselves to not having sex, for example a nun or a monk.

Sexual orientation is usually an important part of a person’s identity. As recently as the 1970s, a person having a same-sex orientation was considered to be pathological and homosexuality was only declassified as a psychological disorder in 1973 (Nel & Lake, 2014). In many parts of the world, same-sex orientation is now accepted as a variant of sexuality rather than a condition or problem to be treated (Nel & Lake, 2014). Even in nations that provide civil rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, there has been (and in some ways continues to be) an assumption that heterosexuality is normal and any other orientation deviant. This has presented a considerable challenge for human rights activists. In addition, non-heterosexual people continue to experience prejudice and discrimination and are not always protected by the civil rights laws established in a number of countries. Nearly all nations, for example, only allow heterosexual couples to marry.
Figure 19.1 Conchita Wurst, winner of the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest
19.1 INTERSEX

The male–female dichotomy has been challenged by research that shows the existence of more than two sex categories (Nel & Lake, 2014). For example, research and activism into the intersex and transgendered communities has begun to publicise the fact that there exists a whole spectrum of human bodies, external genitalia and internal sex organs, well beyond a penis or vagina (Preves, 2009; Yescavage & Alexander, 2009). In the past, babies born with ambiguous genitalia were called hermaphrodites, but the term ‘intersexed’ is now used as a more respectful alternative. Intersex seems to be more common in Africa compared to other parts of the world. Traditionally, intersexed babies were subjected to surgery which assigned them to a particular sex. More recently, a number of global movements have arisen protesting this process. They argue that diversity should be accepted. They also argue that the person should not undergo surgery until they are old enough to choose this as an option, as well as choose their sex themselves.

Cross-dressing is another aspect that relates to gender identity but not necessarily to sexual orientation. When a person cross-dresses, they wear the clothes and accessories that in their culture are usually associated with the ‘opposite’ gender. Interestingly, in Western society it seems more acceptable for girls and women to dress as males (think jeans or other trousers), whereas a young boy who tries on the fairy outfits at preprimary school raises much more concern (Bukatko & Daehler, 2004). An interesting case is that of Conchita Wurst, who won the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest. Ms Wurst is a cross-dressing biological male (Thomas Neuwirth), a fact made evident by her facial hair (see Figure 19.1).
19.2 SEX, GENDER AND THE CASE OF CASTER SEMENYA

By Michael Rance

Caster Semenya (see Figure 19.2) is a South African athlete who won the gold medal in the women’s 800 metre race at the 2009 International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) World Championships. After her victory, the IAAF decided to investigate her sex, allegedly based on the fact that she had improved her previous time by eight seconds. The IAAF decided to submit Semenya to a ‘gender test’ to determine whether she was biologically a male, a female or intersexed. (This showed an incorrect understanding of gender, which is socially constructed rather than biologically determined, as already discussed above.) In Semenya’s case, the IAAF wished to test her against the norms established for biological males and females, and with respect to the categories people can compete in within athletic sports.

When word of this got out to the international media, rumours spread that Semenya was secretly either a man or intersexed, and that she had won the race because of this. Again we can begin to see how expectations about the behaviours of men and women influence people’s thinking: because Semenya’s performance as a woman athlete defied our expectations, there was an assumption that something was wrong.

This process caused a national furore within South Africa, with people from all over the country challenging the move made by the IAAF. Semenya was offered a huge amount of support as it was perceived that her privacy was being violated both by the media and the IAAF. However, in offering support, the public reverted to the binary opposites of man and woman; they simply insisted that she was actually a woman, and should be allowed to compete within this category.
The case of Caster Semenya highlighted the fact that people not only often conflate sex and gender, but that society struggles to acknowledge individuals who do not fit with the sex binary of male or female.

Psychology and gender

The study of gender has not traditionally been included in psychology, and women’s issues have not been an established focus of research, theory and practice. As a science, psychology has been criticised for being biased against women, emphasising the experiences of men (mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual and from the global north) and generalising these to all of humanity.
(Boonzaaier & Shefer, 2006). In response to such criticism, psychology as a discipline turned to the study of sex differences. Perhaps the most debated questions in this area of research are whether there are significant psychological differences between the sexes, and if so, what the origins of these differences are.

Sex difference research in psychology has focused on variations in sensory abilities, attention, verbal and spatial skills, cognitive styles, aggression and many other areas (Burr, 1998). In a classic study, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) reviewed the evidence from studies that focused on sex differences. They concluded that there were differences between males and females in only four areas, namely verbal ability, visual-spatial ability, mathematical ability and aggressiveness. However, they also pointed out that the differences were overstated and that similarities were frequently ignored.

Based on the assumption that there are real differences between the sexes, psychology has offered a number of theories to account for the development of sexual identity in children. The theories we discuss below include biological accounts, psychoanalytic theory, social learning theory, cognitive developmental approaches, gender schema theory and the social constructionist approach to gender.

**Summary**

- Sex difference between people refers to differences in chromosomes, hormones and genital organs.
- Gender refers to the characteristics (masculine or feminine) that a society or culture assigns to a person on the basis of their sex.
- Sex and gender are very closely associated. In some cases, the terms are (erroneously) used interchangeably.
- Sexuality refers to the way people experience and express their sexual feelings.
- Sexual orientation refers to how or where people direct their sexual interest. People may be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual. In the past (and in some places/cultures, this is still the case), there has been an assumption that heterosexuality is normal and any other orientation is deviant.
- Cross-dressing refers to wearing clothes or accessories usually worn by the ‘opposite’ gender.
- Psychology has been criticised for being biased against women, as it generalises the experiences of men to all people. In response, research into differences between the sexes was initiated. This concluded that there are differences between males and females in only four areas: verbal ability, visual-spatial ability, mathematical ability and aggressiveness. However, differences between men and women have often been overstated and similarities ignored.

**Theories that account for gender/sex differences**

**Biological accounts**

Biological accounts argue that males and females are intrinsically different, and that masculinity and femininity are derived from these biological differences (Bukatko & Daehler, 2004). From this perspective, the origin of the differences between women and men is located in the genes, hormones or evolutionary factors. Biological factors are seen to produce gender differences in personality, such as aggressiveness in males or nurturance in females (Archer, 2004).

This biological view has been labelled as essentialist. **Gender essentialism** refers to the belief in inherent, natural differences between males and females and that, if they develop ‘properly’, males become masculine men and females become feminine women. It assumes that gender is inherent at birth and that gender traits, such as our character and temperament, and the areas in which we excel (Shefer, 2004) are internal and unchanging (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). Essentialist views pay little attention to social, historical and cultural influences, and gender is assumed to be the
same across time and location. Biological accounts of gender do not allow for individual agency, choice and change. If we assume that men are inherently aggressive by virtue of their genetic make-up or evolutionary adaptation, why is it that only some men perpetrate acts of violence, and how do we combat problems such as men’s violence against women?

**Psychoanalytic theory**

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality and sexual development suggests that gender identity develops as a result of internal, unconscious conflicts in children. According to this theory, between the ages of three to five years, children develop an attraction to the opposite-sex parent. Freud suggested that boys experience an Oedipus complex, named after the Greek myth in which Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother (see Chapter 5 for more on Freud’s theory). Girls experience a similar attraction to their fathers when they realise they do not possess a penis. Freud named this penis envy. Both girls and boys experience conflict and anxiety over their attraction to the opposite-sex parent and their sexual competition with the same-sex parent. However, the conflict is resolved when they realise the risks of competing with the same-sex parent (Bukatko & Daehler, 2004) and they later come to identify with that parent, and develop a gender identity and behaviour similar to the same-sex parent. Freud believed that the conflict is resolved differently for boys and girls. Boys are able to resolve the conflict fully, identify with their fathers and develop a strong superego (responsible for moral development). Girls, according to Freud, do not fully resolve the crisis and have a weaker identification with their mothers, resulting in a weaker superego and an inferiority complex (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001) (also refer to Chapter 5).

As could be expected, Freud’s views on women have been subjected to considerable criticism, particularly by feminist psychologists. His theory has also been critiqued for being essentialist and for universalising human sexual development (Chodorow, 1994), and for overlooking cultural, social and historical contingencies. As a result, theorists began to accord more attention to the social aspects of gender development.

**Social learning theory**

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) (also refer to Chapter 5) argues that attitudes and behaviours are learned from the surrounding environment. Theorists note that individuals acquire masculine and feminine characteristics and skills by using significant others as role models. The concept of **socialisation** was introduced to refer to the ways in which individuals learn gender-appropriate behaviour. It is a broad term that is generally used to describe the processes through which children learn the ‘rules’ of behaviour, the systems of beliefs and the values of their society. Socialising agents such as parents, family members, teachers, peers and the media convey repeated messages both verbally and through their actions. Through their exposure to these messages, children learn gender-appropriate behaviour patterns and attitudes.

Social learning occurs in complex ways. Adults communicate messages about gender both consciously and unconsciously. As described above, from the time of their birth, babies are treated differently depending upon their sex. The first question usually asked is: ‘Is it a girl or a boy?’ The answer to that question becomes a central organiser of the child’s life and the way others relate to him/her. Conscious gendered messages (see Figure 19.3) conveyed by parents may include dressing children in different colours – blue (and other bright primary colours) for boys and pink (and other light pastel colours) for girls – and giving children sex-typed toys.
Figure 19.3 Conscious gendered messages conveyed by parents may include dressing children differently and giving them sex-typed toys

At the unconscious level, parents also communicate differently with girls and boys. Burr (1998) cites research that shows that the responses of parents and other family members to children vary depending on their gender. For example, Walum (in Burr, 1998) found that baby girls’ and boys’ cries were interpreted differently - boys were assumed to cry to exercise their lungs, whereas girls’ crying was interpreted as a sign of distress. Another example of an unconscious gendered message is when people interpret boys’ mischievous behaviour as natural, while expecting passive and constrained behaviour from girls. Likewise, the stories children are told about princes and princesses, and the dolls and action heroes that they are given, all convey messages about gender roles and stereotypes.

In the past, social learning theorists referred to the tasks, responsibilities and expectations of men and women as gender roles. However, we now understand that gender goes beyond playing a role and thus the term ‘doing gender’ came into use. Doing gender is not only a display or behaviour. By doing gender, we also construct, produce and reproduce gender in all of our daily social interactions (West & Zimmerman, 2009). The expectations that, for example, women care for children and men are breadwinners, are particular ways in which women and men do gender. These ways of doing gender frequently go unchallenged, and those who do challenge them are often criticised (e.g. a woman who does not assume the role of primary caregiver may be labelled a bad mother). Ways of doing gender and gender stereotypes form a network that shapes our behaviours in particular ways, from the way we dress, to our use of language and how we express our sexuality.

Gender stereotypes refer to psychological traits and behavioural characteristics that are attributed to women and men by virtue of their group membership. Gender stereotypes are both descriptive (describing particular characteristics or behaviours) and prescriptive (guiding the ways in which we act in particular situations) (Moghaddam, 1998). Our daily realities provide us with many examples of gender stereotypes, such as beliefs that women are emotional, passive, dependent and better homemakers, and that men are aggressive, strong, assertive and better drivers. But these stereotypes vary from one culture to another and, as Nosipho observes at the beginning of the chapter, they vary from one historical period to the next. Nevertheless, gender stereotypes are a powerful force providing prescriptions for how we ought to be. Gender stereotypes are said to develop at a young age, and studies show how even young children have already learned to show preferences for gender-stereotyped toys (Serbin, Poulin-Dubois, Colbourne & Eichstedt, 2001). Visual preferences for gender-stereotyped toys (e.g. cars for boys and dolls for girls) emerge...
between 12 to 18 months of age, when children recognise that specific types of toys are associated with a particular gender.

Social learning theory has made significant advances in our understandings of gender, accounting for how individuals learn gender-appropriate behaviour and the norms and rules of their cultures. However, the theory has been critiqued for not acknowledging individual agency, and for portraying individuals as passively responding to the socialising agents in the surrounding environment. In so doing, insufficient attention is accorded to children’s cognitive processes and self-identification – issues that are addressed by the cognitive developmental approaches to gender development.

**Cognitive developmental approaches**

Cognitive developmental approaches to gender, developed by Kohlberg (1966) among others, are based on Piaget’s stage theory of cognitive development (see Chapter 3). The approach suggests that children understand the world in terms of categories and use cognitive processes to acquire gender-related behaviour. Kohlberg argued that there are three aspects to the development of gender identity in children, namely gender labelling, gender knowledge and gender constancy. **Gender labelling** refers to the attribution of terms such as girl and boy, **gender knowledge** refers to knowledge about the particular characteristics of females and males, and **gender constancy** is the recognition that gender does not change.

### 19.3 GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA

Source: Furnham, Pallangyo and Gunter (2001)

Researchers examined the role of gender stereotypes in Zimbabwean television advertisements by analysing 110 advertisements. They found that men and women were frequently depicted in contrasting roles and settings. Men were more often portrayed as experts, professionals and product authorities. They were often represented in work or outdoor settings and were more likely to be associated with non-domestic products (cars or sports). Women were typically shown as consumers or product users, occupying roles such as wife or mother and commonly depicted with children. They were also more likely to be represented in dependent roles and shown in the home. Women were regularly associated with domestic products. Social learning theory suggests that we learn gender-appropriate behaviour through observation and the modelling of our behaviour on a role model. Therefore, the gender-stereotyped messages in these types of advertisements would reinforce stereotyped gendered behaviour, particularly in children. It is likely, however, that these stereotypes are changing as more female authorities are depicted in advertising, along with more males in parenting roles.

Children’s awareness of gender has been shown to become more complex as they get older. Awareness of gender categories is typically displayed at about three years of age. Initially, gender is merely a label. For example, four-year olds are likely to think that a person’s gender has changed if the person wears clothes associated with a different gender. By the age of six or seven, gender constancy is acquired and children recognise that gender has some level of consistency and stability – at this age they identify closely with and want to imitate the gender to which they have been assigned.

Cognitive developmental theories have been critiqued for their focus on individual differences in development. The theories also pay scant attention to other social and environmental factors and do not adequately account for why children choose gender as a primary category, rather than other categories such as religion or race.

**Gender schema theory**

The gender schema theory conceptualised by Sandra Bem (1981a) was developed as a critique of
the passive representations of children in the social learning approaches. It combines aspects of social/cultural learning with cognitive developmental approaches. The theory suggests that gender identity and development arise from the processing of gender schemata. Schemata are the conceptual frameworks individuals use to make sense of the world around them. Children develop conceptual schemata of masculinity and femininity through which they perceive the world and interpret their own and others’ behaviour. Information used in the child’s cognitive processing is mediated by the culture’s definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Gender schemata are crucial to the development of gender identity and constructions of self. They encompass assumptions about masculinity and femininity as well as appropriate behaviour and attitudes (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Gender schemata are linked to gender stereotypes in that they both facilitate our thinking about males and females, and they also have a prescriptive element, guiding gender-appropriate behaviour.

For example, children are exposed to the common stereotype that men or boys express their anger more than women or girls. This idea is assimilated as part of the child’s gender schemata. Stereotypes (and gender roles) are frequently internalised and therefore perpetuated. The social acceptability of men expressing their anger is related to masculine ways of doing gender, such as assertiveness and dominance. Studies have found that girls typically suppress their anger more than boys or use gendered options for the expression of emotions (Cox, Stabb & Hulgus, 2000). Research has also shown that women in abusive relationships subscribe to gender-stereotypical norms of the ‘good woman’ or the ‘good wife’ and conform to constructions of femininity as nurturing and caring (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

The pervasive assumption about gender as a construct rooted in biological differences has been challenged by research that has shown that gender does not simply emerge from anatomy or hormones; instead, meanings of femininity and masculinity are created and recreated through the social order and social practices.

**Social constructionism**

A social constructionist approach asserts that gender differences, rather than being the result of biology, are constructed by the society in which we live and through our interactions with others. Rather than viewing masculinity and femininity as essential, natural and inevitable characteristics, this view posits that gender is constructed within particular social and historical contexts. Theorists point out that what it means to be male or female has changed over the centuries and is not the same in all cultural contexts.

More recently, some theorist have argued that both sex and gender are socially constructed (Giddens, 2006). According to this view, the body is not just a ‘given’; rather, ‘the human body itself is subject to social forces which shape and alter it in various ways’ (Giddens, 2006, p. 461). For example, people can use plastic surgery or diet to ‘reconstruct’ their bodies. This view sees sex differences and gender identities as closely linked.

In our society, however, particular behaviours and codes of dress are usually understood as either masculine or feminine. But gender is not simply a characteristic or trait of individuals; it is embedded in a range of institutional arrangements and structures that constitute society. A recent development has been the focus on masculinities. According to Connell (in Giddens, 2006), a society is characterised by a gender order which is the pattern of power relations between masculinities and femininities. There is a hierarchy of expressions of these power relations based on a single premise – the domination of men over women (Giddens, 2006). According to Giddens (2006, p. 463), the top of the hierarchy is occupied by ‘hegemonic masculinity, which is dominant over all other masculinities and femininities’.
SUMMARY

- Biological theories argue that males and females are intrinsically different, and that masculinity and femininity are derived from these biological differences. This biological view has been labelled as essentialist. Essentialist views ignore social, historical and cultural influences. Biological accounts of gender do not allow for individual agency, choice and change.

- Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality and sexual development suggests that gender identity develops as a result of internal, unconscious conflicts in children in the pre-school period. Freud’s views have been criticised by feminist psychologists. They are also criticised as essentialist and for overlooking cultural, social and historical influences.

- Bandura’s social learning theory argues that gender-appropriate attitudes and behaviours are learned through socialisation by parents, family members, teachers, peers and the media. Adults communicate messages about gender both consciously and unconsciously. The theory has been critiqued for seeing individuals as passively responding to the socialising agents in the surrounding environment. Insufficient attention is given to children’s agency, cognitive processes and self-identification.

- ‘Doing gender’ goes beyond gender roles; it is a way we also construct, produce, and re-produce gender in all of our daily social interactions.

- Gender stereotypes are the psychological traits and behavioural characteristics that are attributed to women and men by virtue of their group membership. Gender stereotypes are both descriptive and prescriptive.

- Cognitive developmental approaches to gender are based on Piaget’s stage theory of cognitive development. The approach suggests that children understand the world in terms of categories and use cognitive processes to acquire gender-related behaviour. Kohlberg said there are three aspects to the development of gender identity in children: gender labelling, gender knowledge and gender constancy. Children’s understanding of gender gets more complex as they get older. This is an individualistic theory, paying little attention to social and environmental factors.

- Gender schema theory combines aspects of social/cultural learning with cognitive developmental approaches. It says that gender identity and development arise from the processing of gender schemata. These schemata are crucial to the development of gender identity and constructions of self.

- The social constructionist approach argues that gender differences, rather than being the result of biology, are constructed by the society in which we live and through our interactions with others. Gender is therefore constructed within particular social and historical contexts.

Gender in society

The issue of equality between men and women is one of the most debated social questions. Although men and women are equal in terms of South African law, women are still discriminated against in various sectors of society. South African statistics show marked differences in the quality of life of men and women, and boys and girls, as well as significant differences in terms of race and class (Budlender, 2002). For example, the overall unemployment rate is higher for women than men (Statistics South Africa, 2014). In almost all aspects, males have more favourable conditions of employment than females. In 2003, 93 per cent of domestic workers, who are almost all women, earned less than R1 000 per month (Hassim, 2005). Following the introduction of a minimum wage for domestic workers in November 2002, domestic worker wages did increase despite little government monitoring (Dinkelman, Ranchod & Hofmeyr, 2014). However, female-headed households have an average annual income of less than half of households which are male-headed (Statistics South Africa, 2014).

Table 19.1 Psychological theories of gender development (adapted from Brannon, 1998, p. 160)
Psychologists have typically viewed sex difference as a fixed variable, dividing human beings into binary categories, such as male or female and masculine or feminine. The introduction of the concept of androgyny significantly challenged these assumptions. In the 1970s, Sandra Bem developed the Bem Sex-role Inventory, which includes 20 stereotypically masculine, 20 stereotypically feminine and 20 neutral traits (Bem, 1981b). The inventory is used to test the degree to which women and men identify with these traits and score as either masculine, feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated. Androgyny is the term used to refer to individuals who show little difference between masculine and feminine scores, and denotes the integration of masculinity and femininity within an individual. Bem also proposed androgyny as a measure of psychological well-being, since the androgynous individual's personality would include a balanced combination of masculine and feminine traits. The concept of androgyny, taken up by many feminist thinkers, was seen to liberate people from the restrictions of gender roles or behaviour. It also challenged traditional assumptions of the female–male dichotomy, allowing for individuals to possess traits associated with both genders (e.g. an individual could be both assertive and empathic). Although the concept of androgyny is no longer at the forefront of research, it does remain a useful variable in social psychology research (see Guastello & Guastello, 2003).

### 19.4 ANDROGYNY

Psychologists have typically viewed sex difference as a fixed variable, dividing human beings into binary categories, such as male or female and masculine or feminine. The introduction of the concept of androgyny significantly challenged these assumptions. In the 1970s, Sandra Bem developed the Bem Sex-role Inventory, which includes 20 stereotypically masculine, 20 stereotypically feminine and 20 neutral traits (Bem, 1981b). The inventory is used to test the degree to which women and men identify with these traits and score as either masculine, feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated. Androgyny is the term used to refer to individuals who show little difference between masculine and feminine scores, and denotes the integration of masculinity and femininity within an individual. Bem also proposed androgyny as a measure of psychological well-being, since the androgynous individual’s personality would include a balanced combination of masculine and feminine traits. The concept of androgyny, taken up by many feminist thinkers, was seen to liberate people from the restrictions of gender roles or behaviour. It also challenged traditional assumptions of the female–male dichotomy, allowing for individuals to possess traits associated with both genders (e.g. an individual could be both assertive and empathic). Although the concept of androgyny is no longer at the forefront of research, it does remain a useful variable in social psychology research (see Guastello & Guastello, 2003).

### Violence against women

Currently, the most significant challenge to gender equity is violence against women. The World Health Organization (2013) reports that globally, 35 per cent of women have experienced violence in their lifetime, either from intimate partners or non-partners. Forms of violence against women are multiple and include rape, sexual harassment and abuse, and these are perpetrated mostly by men. Rape is an under-reported crime in South Africa (as elsewhere). The reasons for under-reporting often include shame, embarrassment and fear. In addition, women sometimes do not define their experiences of sexual coercion as rape, particularly when the perpetrator is an intimate partner (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003). In addition, rape is more likely to occur in and around the home and to be perpetrated by someone known to the victim (Hirschowitz, Worku & Orkin, 2000).

Women and girls may experience sexual harassment in a number of contexts, such as the workplace, educational institutions or in the home. Even schools are often violent places for children, particularly girls. A study by Human Rights Watch (2001) found that South African schoolgirls are subjected to multiple forms of violence, such as sexual harassment, emotional
abuse, verbal degradation and rape. These incidents were perpetrated by teachers, other learners, other school employees and strangers. Other forms of gender violence that are widespread include femicide (the misogynistic killing of women), female genital mutilation and forced prostitution.

In South Africa in 1999, 8.8 women (over 14 years of age) per 100 000 were killed by an intimate partner. This amounts to four women killed per day (one every six hours) – the highest rate found ‘in research anywhere in the world’ (Mathews, Abrahams, Martin et al., 2004). Violence from intimate partners negatively affects women’s physical and mental health, with many experiencing anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, suicide attempts, panic attacks, and/or other negative psychological and emotional consequences (Bollen, Artz, Vetten & Louw, 1999; Gass, Stein, Williams & Seedat, 2010). Overall, gender violence has a damaging effect on the mental and physical health of women and girls. While gender-based violence is primarily constructed as violence against females, it is important to recognise that males can also be victims of such violence. Carpenter (2006) notes that males may be subject to sexual violence, forced conscription and sex-selective massacre.

SUMMARY

- Equality between men and women in society is not yet a reality, despite the terms of South African law. Women are discriminated against in employment, and women and girls have a poorer quality of life.
- Currently, the most significant challenge to gender equity is violence against women. Women suffer a high incidence of intimate partner violence (such as abuse, rape and murder).
- Women and girls may also experience sexual harassment in a number of contexts, such as the workplace, educational institutions or the home.
- Other forms of gender violence that are widespread include femicide (the misogynistic killing of women), female genital mutilation and forced prostitution.

Feminism

At its most basic, feminism can be seen as a belief in the social, political, economic and cultural equality of the sexes. However, it is not just an intellectual or academic pursuit, but also a movement for action (Kiguwa, 2004). Feminists actively try to change social relations which subordinate or suppress women and their rights. Furthermore, Tong (in Kiguwa, 2004) makes the point that just as women are unique and different from each other, so too are there many kinds of feminism. Thus it is most useful to think of feminisms as a plural concept, acknowledging in this way the various theoretical perspectives which have articulated feminist issues.

The earliest feminist movements emerged in Europe and North America. These were initially relatively conservative and they based their arguments on the idea that there are no fundamental differences between men and women and therefore there should be equal rights regardless of gender.
19.5 THE ESSENTIALIST/CONSTRUCTIONIST DEBATE

An area of theorising that has been characterised by much debate and controversy is the contestation between essentialist and constructionist views of gender which we briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter. Essentialism is the belief in the true essence of individuals. From a gendered perspective, the approach assumes that men and women are inherently different and that gender differences are defined at birth and are fixed throughout our lifespan (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). Essentialism believes that qualities such as competitiveness and nurturance are intrinsically male and female qualities, respectively (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). Biological differences are taken as the starting point for producing a variety of social and psychological consequences (attitudes, behaviours and social organisation).

Many psychologists reject essentialist assumptions as they are often linked with various forms of prejudice (Morton, Postmes, Haslam & Hornsey, 2009). They also present a problem for feminist psychology in that if essentialism is accepted, for example if we assume that men and women are essentially different in terms of their psychological make-up, it would be difficult to change inequality between the sexes (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). From an essentialist standpoint, differences between men and women are assumed to arise from biology or nature and would result in a natural gender order where women are subordinate to men.

From a different standpoint, Crompton and Lyonette (2005) discuss Hakim's preference theory, which suggests that women choose certain occupations (e.g. teaching) because they grant them flexibility in their working life. However, Hakim has been criticised for downplaying structural constraints against women (e.g. lower wages) that may inhibit their choices.

Critiques of essentialism include challenges to the universalistic assumptions about woman/women as a fixed category and to the lack of attention given to diversity among women and similarities between women and men (Morton et al., 2009). In addition, feminist debates on difference and equality have questioned the idea that all women experience the same things (that there is a unitary female experience). At this point, the social constructionist approach to gender enters the debate.

From a social constructionist perspective, gender is understood as being constructed within particular cultural, social and historic contexts (Giddens, 2006). We constantly do gender (West & Zimmerman, 2009) because we are placed in gendered situations (or in contexts of gendered power relations) (Giddens, 2006). Thus, we internalise gender norms and behave in gendered (or nongendered) ways by either accepting or resisting those norms. This approach strengthens our theorising since diversity which arises from particular contexts is acknowledged. The focus shifts from the individual to the social, and the role of power in the construction of gender is examined (Giddens, 2006). Reflecting contemporary understandings of gender as a relational construction, this approach has gained ascendancy in feminist psychology.

Many of the early schools of feminism were offshoots from political movements. For example, Marxist feminism grew out of the Marxist critique around the ownership of private property. Around 1970, the women’s movement in the US saw the emergence of a more radical brand of feminism, one which explicitly argued that gender differences were socially constructed. This strand of feminism was determined to destroy patriarchal society (Kiguwa, 2004).

A crisis in feminism

It is clear that these European feminisms were firmly rooted in a Western individualistic tradition. They were primarily concerned with the position experienced by middle-class women. In response to this, many African-American women felt alienated and argued that their position was not adequately considered by these ‘White’ feminisms. In the 1980s, as a result of the tensions around various groups of women (black women, lesbians, working-class women) feeling excluded from mainstream feminism, a crisis in feminism occurred (Fraser, 2013). Out of this critique, there emerged a range of black feminisms, including womanism and African feminism.

Feminism has, however, struggled to gain ground in Africa as it has often been rejected as an ‘embarrassing Western philosophy’ (Ata Aidoo, in Kiguwa, 2004, p. 278). Many of the black feminist movements argued that only black women could adequately understand the experiences of black
women. In addition, these theorists were concerned with the intersecting and simultaneous issues of gender, race and class, saying that it is necessary to take all of these into consideration in order to understand the experiences of black women. Lastly, African feminism has been associated with a return to pre-colonial social relations in which women’s roles were respected and revered.

A new masculinity

Traditionally, masculinity has been associated with aggressive, assertive and authoritarian ideals, and men have been defined as powerful, strong and aggressive. Violent behaviour is positively regarded as symbolic of masculinity and male authority (Giddens, 2006). Within a patriarchal culture, men are socialised into keeping women subordinate through the use of violence, for example. Thus, as Wood (2004, in Shefer, Boonzaaier & Kiguwa, 2006) found in a study with 22 male prisoners, male violence is a reflection of male authority and domination over women. Studies address how men account for the perpetration of violence against their partners, as well as the connections between masculinity and violence (Wood & Jewkes, 2001). Within this line of research, there appears to be some consensus that cultural or social contexts set the scene for men’s violence against women and construct dominant forms of masculinity and femininity, which men and women draw upon in order to construct gendered identities.

From a social constructionist perspective, many studies have started to focus on what it means to be a man and on issues that affect men’s lives. An area of research entitled critical men’s studies (Connell, Hearn & Kimmel, 2005) addresses issues of masculinity by critiquing male power and domination. Masculinity has been described as shifting, dynamic, socially constructed and contested (Morrell, 2001). Connell et al. (2005) showed how men do not all benefit equally from male domination (patriarchy) and how certain forms of masculinity have become culturally dominant, depending on the norms and values of the surrounding culture. These forms of masculinity emphasised certain characteristics at particular social and historical moments.

19.6 MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE

Source: Wood and Jewkes (2001)

Researchers explored how young men living in a township in the Eastern Cape spoke about perpetrating violence against female partners. They conducted in-depth interviews with young Xhosaspeaking men. They found that adolescent sexual relationships were characterised by violence, coercive sex and threats towards female partners. Young men’s notions of masculinity were partially defined in terms of their control over sexual relationships with women. In general, research participants constructed gender relations in patriarchal terms – with women constructed as sexually passive and men as sexually aggressive.

Their talk also reflected compliance with the sexual double standard – implying that it is acceptable for men to have multiple partners, but completely unacceptable for women.

The researchers found connections between young men’s talk about violence and predominant forms of masculinity available in their community and in South Africa at large. They showed how culturally dominant (hegemonic) forms of masculinity are socially constructed and how young men draw upon these in their sexual relationships.

Morrell (2001) describes three categories of men’s response strategies to gender change in South Africa: defensive, accommodating and progressive. In the first category, men are invested in maintaining the traditional gender order and resist challenges by feminism and women’s groups. In the second and third categories, where men either adapt to or welcome change, men are challenging violent forms of masculinity and exploring new ways of being men. As a result of continual challenges to masculinity and men’s particular circumstances (e.g. unemployment), forms of masculinity are constantly shifting and contested.
### SUMMARY

- Feminism can be seen as a belief in the social, political, economic and cultural equality of the sexes, as well as action to achieve this.
- There are many kinds of feminism. The early movements emerged in Europe and North America; they were initially quite conservative. Many of the early schools of feminism were offshoots from political movements. Later movements were more radical, seeking to destroy patriarchy.
- Many women (black/lesbian/working class) felt alienated from the European feminisms that were rooted in a Western individualistic tradition. This led to a crisis in feminism from which emerged a range of black feminisms, including womanism and African feminism.
- Feminism has struggled to gain ground in Africa. Some argued that only black women could adequately understand the experiences of black women. Others felt that issues of gender, race and class needed to be considered simultaneously.
- Traditional masculinity is assertive, authoritarian and aggressive, and men are often socialised into maintaining a dominant position over women. The field of critical men's studies has critiqued this, raising the notion of masculinity as shifting, dynamic, contested and socially constructed.
- In South Africa, men have responded in various ways using defensive, accommodating and/or progressive strategies.

### 19.7 BLACK MEN’S SUCCESS AT UNIVERSITY

Source: Harper (2009)

Harper's (2009) article begins with a quote which is also relevant to apartheid South Africa:

> The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies ... If you teach the Negro that he has accomplished as much good as any other race, he will achieve and aspire to equality and justice without regard to race. (Woodson 1933, p. 2)

Harper (2009) conducted a qualitative study with 143 black male undergraduates across 30 predominantly white colleges and universities in the US. He began by noting the long history of negative expectations and stereotyping applied to black males in society, and in educational institutions, in particular. He argued that black men have 'long been regarded as criminals, irresponsible fathers ..., drug addicts ..., lovers of flashy possessions, and violent rapists' (Harper, 2009, p. 697). In schools, black youth are typically expected to misbehave and drop out of school. He thus set out to demonstrate a different story, a counter-narrative against this long history of negativity.

Amongst other findings, Harper found that the first myth was that all black male students are ‘the same’. Second, universities were focused on supporting and managing struggling black male students, while ignoring the successes of those who were reaching high levels of achievement. Third, some of the study's participants had deliberately set about presenting black male students in a more positive light, presenting them in student media as ‘thoughtful, politically engaged and socially conscious’ (Harper, 2009, p. 706). Others called attention to racism wherever they encountered it. Harper (2009, p. 2010) concluded his article with the following:

> I still wish to see oppressive stereotypes that distract black male collegians from their academics replaced with higher expectations of their achievements, less shock when they do well or say something thoughtful, and lower tolerance for racist caricaturing of them by their white classmates.

Much the same could be said of black men (and women) in general in South Africa today.

### Conclusion

To end this chapter, we return to the point made at the beginning, that psychology has traditionally been criticised for being biased against women. Psychology has also been critiqued
for its individualistic bias – for ignoring the broader context in which gender identity and relationships develop. Illustrative of these critiques, we showed that to be able to properly understand gender, we must be prepared to look beyond psychology to other disciplines such as sociology and gender studies to properly locate gender within the social, historical and political contexts (Giddens, 2006).

However, in spite of these critiques, psychology has made significant inroads in understanding gender. Social learning, cognitive developmental and gender schema theories have each made unique contributions to our understandings of gender issues, particularly in childhood. The focus on women’s issues from within psychology has also advanced our understanding of topics that have either been ignored or distorted. As an area of research, the psychology of women explores a wide range of psychological issues that concern women, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause (Matlin, 2000). Theorists also explore topics that affect women almost exclusively, such as rape, abuse and other forms of gender violence. Areas that have traditionally been approached from a male point of view, such as achievement, work and sexuality, are also investigated (Matlin, 2000).

There has also been a proliferation of critical studies on masculinity and issues relevant to men’s lives, such as fathering, violence and relationships as well as interesting and emerging work on diverse forms of masculinity (black, urban, working-class) and ways of being a man (see Morrell, 2001).

Contemporary feminist psychologists acknowledge the need to transform psychology as a discipline by addressing its male bias, and many psychologists also acknowledge the need to shift away from traditional positivist research to methods that are more able to account for the variability of human experience and how we are affected by the social context.

19.8 GENDERED NARRATIVES

Source: Boonzaier and De la Rey (2003)
Researchers conducted a narrative study to explore how women constructed gender in their talk of violence. The study was conducted with 15 women who experienced violence from their partners in Mitchell’s Plain, in the Western Cape. In their narratives of abuse, women constructed shifting gendered identities. At times, women’s talk reflected compliance with hegemonic forms of femininity, emphasising qualities such as caring, nurturing, submission and passivity. Women spoke about being a good wife/woman by providing love, care and tenderness to soften their partners’ hardness. Some women also took up gendered positions of the good wife, suggesting that they should remain sexually available to their husbands.

At other times in their narratives, women resisted these stereotypical gendered constructions and spoke about their strength, determination and resistance. Women also constructed masculinity as powerful, dominant and authoritative while simultaneously being threatened by powerlessness, inferiority and emasculation.

The study highlighted the shifting and contradictory nature of gendered identities, particularly in violent relationships.

KEY CONCEPTS

- **androgyny**: the term used to refer to individuals who show little difference between masculine and feminine scores on Bem’s Sex-role Inventory, denoting the integration of masculinity and femininity within an individual
- **cognitive developmental approaches to gender**: approaches that suggest that children understand the world in terms of categories and use cognitive processes to acquire gender-related behaviour
- **critical men's studies**: an area of research that addresses issues of masculinity by critiquing male
power and domination

- **cross-dressing**: wearing clothing and accessories that are usually associated with the ‘opposite’ gender in a particular society
- **doing gender or gender performances**: particular behaviours, tasks, responsibilities and expectations of men and women and the construction, production and re-production of gender in our daily lives
- **gender**: the characteristics (masculine or feminine) that a society or culture assigns to a person on the basis of their sex
- **gender constancy**: the recognition that gender does not change
- **gender essentialism**: the belief in inherent, natural differences between women and men
- **gender knowledge**: knowledge about the particular characteristics of females and males
- **gender labelling**: the use of terms such as girl and boy
- **gender stereotypes**: psychological traits and behavioural characteristics attributed to women and men by virtue of their group membership
- **schemata**: the conceptual frameworks individuals use to make sense of the world around them
- **sex differences**: differences between people in terms of their biological characteristics including differences in chromosomes, hormones and the person’s genital organs
- **sexuality**: how people experience and express their sexual feelings
- **sexual orientation**: a concept describing a person’s particular sexual feelings directed toward another person with a set of corresponding categories (i.e. gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight)
- **social constructionism**: a theoretical perspective that looks at how relationships between people are socially constructed in particular cultural, social and historic contexts
- **socialisation**: a broad term that is generally used to describe the processes through which children learn society’s rules, beliefs and values

**EXERCISES**

**Multiple choice questions**

1. ‘Gender traits are internal, consistent and natural.’ This quotation is typical of which approach to gender?
   a) social constructionism
   b) essentialism
   c) naturalism
   d) none of the above is correct.

2. Nondumiso believes that, as a woman, it is her duty to do the grocery shopping, clean the home and take care of the children. Nondumiso is adhering to strict:
   a) gender bias
   b) gender labelling
   c) gender stereotypes
   d) gender roles.

3. A two-year-old boy who plays with cars and guns and shows aversion to playing with dolls illustrates early signs of:
   a) gender-role aversion
   b) gender-stereotypical behaviour
   c) gender labelling
   d) gender modelling.
4. Socialisation refers to:
   a) the learning of feminine and masculine behaviour
   b) the learning of societal rules, norms and beliefs
   c) the internalisation of gendered messages conveyed by parents, peers, media and social institutions
   d) all of the above are correct.

5. Gender labelling, gender constancy and gender knowledge are the underlying tenets of:
   a) Bandura’s social learning theory
   b) Piaget’s cognitive developmental approach
   c) Kohlberg’s cognitive developmental approach
   d) Bem’s gender schema theory.

6. When children recognise that a person’s gender does not change when they wear clothing associated with the opposite sex, they are displaying an awareness of:
   a) gender labelling
   b) gender knowledge
   c) gender constancy
   d) none of the above is correct.

7. Individuals who are undifferentiated with regard to masculine and feminine traits may be described as:
   a) gender neutral
   b) asexual
   c) transsexual
   d) androgynous.

8. The approach that views gender as comprising individual behaviours and beliefs, interpersonal relations and social-structural power relations, is known as:
   a) essentialism
   b) radical feminism
   c) social constructionism
   d) constructivism.

9. A crisis in feminism occurred when:
   a) critical men’s studies began to emerge
   b) black, lesbian and working class feminists criticised mainstream theorists for their exclusivity
   c) feminists entered the essentialist/constructionist debate
   d) violence against women emerged as the most significant contemporary gender-related issue.

10. Radical feminism views __________ as the primary source(s) of gender inequality.
    a) sexism
    b) patriarchy
    c) discrimination.
    d) all of the above are correct.

Short-answer questions

1. Discuss and compare the three psychosocial theories that account for gender development in
2. Explain the differences between an essentialist and a social constructionist approach to gender.
3. What are the key features of Freud’s approach to gender development? Discuss how Freud’s approach has been critiqued.
4. Identify and describe the three central aspects of the cognitive developmental approach to gender identity development in children. At which ages do children typically display the three processes?
CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

• give a definition of violence
• provide a general overview of the breadth and depth of this field of study
• discuss violence as a public health problem using a systemic approach
• describe the consequences of violence, especially traumatic stress responses
• discuss and critique the range of violence prevention strategies in use, such as those used to assist individuals, families and communities affected by violence
• define and describe in your own words the concepts of peacemaking and peacebuilding
• outline the differences between peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding
• identify and elaborate on the major theoretical principles underlying these concepts
• present an argument for a culturally centred approach to peacemaking and peacebuilding
• describe a framework for action through which psychologists can contribute to peace processes.

CASE STUDY

Yolisa had only been a young child during the political conflict of the apartheid era in South Africa, but she had been aware of the violence, fear and anger around her. As Yolisa grew up, she came to understand much more of the conflict and how it had affected not only her family, but also many others. It was hard to discuss some of these things with white people, but as Yolisa began to develop better relationships with some white friends, she heard about their different experiences of living in South Africa. She was surprised to hear how traumatised her friend's uncle had been after being sent out to keep control in a township.

But instead of the improvement everyone had expected after 1994, it seemed that violence was still one of the biggest threats people faced in their lives. Yolisa had several friends and even some family members who had been mugged or threatened with violence. Quite recently, her cousin, a young man close to her own age, had been attacked by two knife-wielding men. She saw him a few days after the incident, but when she asked about it, he seemed reluctant to talk.

'It was nothing – they just took my wallet,' he said.

But Yolisa's aunt was worried about her son. He had been very irritable since the mugging and just wanted to be alone. Yolisa's aunt told how he had also lost interest in his college work. Yolisa was convinced that, even though her cousin had downplayed the mugging, he had in fact been quite traumatised by it.

Yolisa felt strongly that the problem of violence needed to be dealt with by society as a whole, not just by each person who suffered its effects. She believed that people needed to teach children that violence and aggression didn't solve their problems. People could also do things in their local community to try to protect one another and fight violence. Yolisa discovered that psychologists could also play a role in building peaceful societies. She felt this was especially important in a country such as South Africa, where violence and conflict had been so much a part of everyone's history.