



...Differently than men. Yes, they're as smart, but they have a unique way of viewing the world.

By Lori B. Andrews

Photographed by Serge Nivelle

When a group of researchers in Massachusetts asked nearly a thousand people of various ages and backgrounds which character traits described men and which described women, there was widespread agreement. Men were viewed as being independent, objective, active, competitive, logical, able to make decisions easily, and ambitious. Women did

have their positive points—being ranked as tactful, religious, neat, quiet, interested in art and literature, and able to express tender feelings. But despite the occasional positive features attributed to women, one shocking fact emerged: both men and women preferred the behavior they labeled masculine.

The higher value placed on the

male approach to life is mirrored in other studies. When kindergartners were asked if they'd like to switch sexes, one in five girls said they'd like to be boys, while no boys wanted to be girls. Children ages six to ten prefer masculine activities to feminine ones. And for every adult man who has wished he were a woman, there are five to twelve women who recall having wished they were a man.

Such studies raise provocative questions. Are certain activities or characteristics inherently male or female? Are people born with a sexual identity that influences their abilities and interests—or do parents, teachers, and others socialize boys and girls differently? When there are actual differences between men and women, is the male approach or ability naturally better?

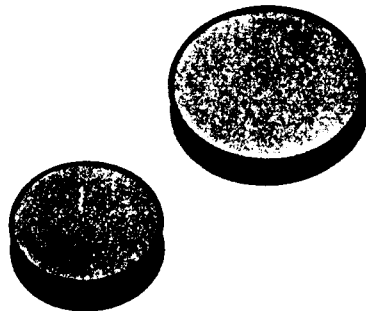
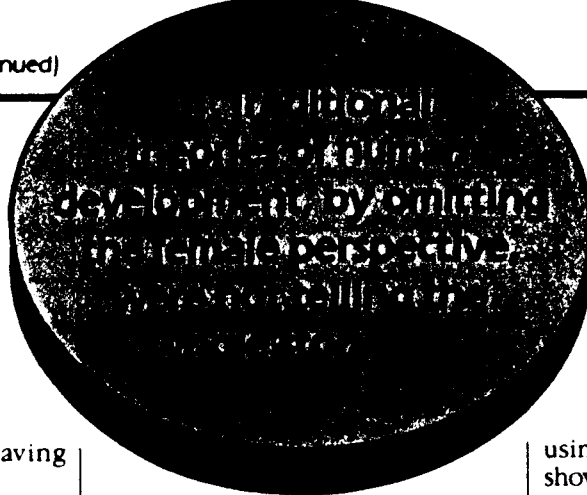
The answers to these questions are being sought by anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, biologists, and medical researchers. In tandem, their work is mapping uncharted territories in the study of sex differences.

Changing views of women.

The study of the differences between men and women has taken a jagged course, twisting and turning with popular theories of the time. For centuries, women were viewed as biologically inferior to men. Scientists felt that through the ages, the development of women's capacity to bear and care for children had proceeded at the expense of other valuable characteristics. As late as the beginning of this century, according to British psychologist John Nicholson, Ph.D., even such prestigious medical journals as the *Lancet* were suggesting that women's intellectual activity needed to be limited, because they required all their energy to develop their reproductive functions.

Scientists of the Victorian era based their claims about innate sex differences on now-discredited assumptions about the different brain sizes of men and women.

Later in this century, scientists developed a different strategy for eliciting sex differences—actual studies of how men and women think and behave. But such studies need to be carefully designed to eliminate re-



searcher prejudice. Many simply do not stand up under close scrutiny.

Take the issue of whether women are more fearful than men. At first glance, anxiety tests that ask questions like "Do you get scared when you have to walk home alone at night?" seem to show that girls are more fearful than boys. Yet John Nicholson, author of *Men & Women: How Different Are They?* (Oxford University Press), points out that the type of questions asked may make it appear that girls are more anxious overall than boys, even if they are not.

"Since little girls will have been warned on many occasions of the dangers of being molested," notes Nicholson, they are likely to give an anxious response to questions about being alone and vulnerable. "Many of the items in the children's personality questionnaires fall into this category, while few relate to boys' special fears—for example, seeming cowardly to his peers or being humiliated in public. It's almost as if the researchers had started out to try to make girls and women appear more fearful."

Questionnaires for adults measuring emotionality do not reveal the whole picture either. In studies where men and women were placed under stress in the laboratory, the women

were more apt to indicate on adjective checklists that they were feeling stressed. Yet in those same studies, when a biological measure of stress was made as well (such as an assessment of the person's blood-sugar level or heart rate), men were the ones showing greater physiological reaction to stress.

Outside of the laboratory, using similar measures, men also showed a greater physical stress response to anxiety—in such situations as driving a car, competing in sports, or taking an exam.

"Are women more emotional than men?" asks Nicholson. "The truth of the matter is that emotion affects men and women differently, and it is impossible to say which sex is affected more." Pointing to the higher incidence of male alcoholism, he says, "It may just be that the two sexes have different escape routes when life becomes too much for them."

Sex differences: born or made?

When differences are found between the sexes, further study is needed to determine whether they are the result of nature (the innate biological differences between men and women); nurture (the contrasting ways in which boys and girls are raised); or some combination of both.

Nature has given men and women different physical capabilities. For example, a woman's body is 25 percent fat, while a man's body is 12 percent fat. The shape of her pelvis differs from his. Differences such as these make it easier for men to achieve speed in running and other activities. In addition, men's muscles apparently use oxygen more efficiently, making it possible for men to have more athletic stamina than women.

However, women's physical forms have advantages as well. Women's muscles have to adapt to a changing menstrual cycle with varied levels of hormones and water retention at different times of the month. Men's muscles are used to a relatively more stable environment—and so are more easily thrown for a loop when illness strikes, perhaps explaining why men complain of aches and pain more frequently when they get the flu. In addition, the muscles of women are less likely to build up pain inducers than

those of men. Consequently, women may show endurance on a task after men have given up because of pain.

The question is whether along with their different inborn physical characteristics, men and women also possess innate sex-typed personality traits. In the mid-1970's, Eleanor Maccoby and Carolyn Jacklin in their book *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (Stanford University Press) launched a serious challenge against the idea that certain psychological differences were actually innate. Since then, considerable evidence has accumulated showing that males and females develop different attitudes, capabilities, interests, and character traits largely because they are stimulated, rewarded, and, in general, socialized in different ways.

In an intriguing study, Caroline Smith and Barbara Lloyd of the University of Sussex, England, asked mothers of infants to play with a six-month-old baby whom they had never met before. Sometimes the mothers were given a boy baby and told it was a girl or vice versa. At other times, the correct sex of the baby was disclosed. No matter what the actual sex of the baby, when a woman thought the baby was a boy, she gave more encouragement to "him" to be physical (for example, to crawl or walk). The toys the women offered the infants differed by sex as well. Girls were offered a doll initially, while boys were offered a squeaky hammer or hourglass rattle. Smith and Lloyd hypothesize that "there are significant differences in the socialization of girls and boys which begin in early infancy."

Parents, teachers, and other influential individuals believe that boys and girls have different needs and abilities and thus often respond to children with their gender in mind.

"If a baby is moving rapidly," says Nicholson, "an adult will soothe it if it is a girl and stimulate it further if it is a boy." Boy babies learn that they can get adults to play with them if they are active. By contrast, girls get frustrated because their overtures are discouraged.

Much has been made of the fact that girls do better than boys at verbal tasks while boys take the lead at math-

ematical and visual-spatial skills. Yet until the age of eleven, girls and boys do equally well at math. Later differences in ability may not be due to an innate male facility with math but to teachers' expectations and encouragement of boys.

In one British study, cited by Nicholson, young boys and girls were asked to build something with locking blocks. Their teachers told researchers that the girls would not want to participate in the experiment. Yet the girls did participate—and built structures as complex and original as those produced by the boys.

Similarly, on traditional tests of visual-spatial skills, one-quarter of the women tested do better than the average man. You would think, then, that at least one-quarter of the engineers and architects would be women. "But when the figure is only one percent, we can be pretty certain that these professions contain a significant number of men doing jobs which could be done better by a woman with a greater natural ability," writes Nicholson. "So an influx of women could only improve the standard of work carried out in those professions."

In *Men & Women: How Different Are They?*, Nicholson concludes that "women are capable of being men's equals, in the sense that there is no

immutable principle of psychology or biology to stop them from doing what men do, as well as men can."

A new psychology of women.

After putting various myths to rest, the study of sex differences is taking a new turn. Rather than focusing on whether women can match male abilities, the questions for the 1980's are what female traits women should hang on to—and how men and society might benefit if men learned (or never lost) some of these female capabilities.

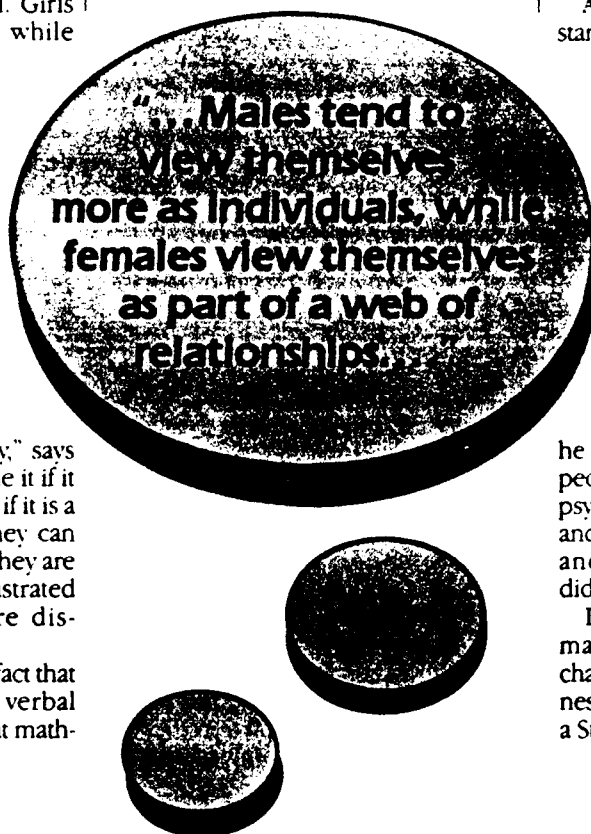
Answering these questions is no easy task. Although we know a lot about how women differ from men, we have few systematic theories about women themselves. Psychological theories about how people make decisions in their lives, how people judge what is right or wrong, and how people conduct their professional and personal lives have been constructed overwhelmingly by studying men. Women who didn't fit the male approach were dismissed as less mature and less developed as people. Only in the past few years have great strides been taken toward developing an integrated theory about women's motives, their moral commitments, the course of their psychological growth, and their special view of what is important in life.

A major force in the growing understanding of women is Carol Gilligan, associate professor of education at Harvard University, who points out how traditional theories of human development, by omitting the female perspective, were not telling the whole story.

Challenging Kohlberg's theory.

Take the influential work of Harvard education professor Lawrence Kohlberg. By doing research on boys, he constructed a theory of the stages people go through in their moral and psychological development. Then, he and others applied this model to girls and women—and claimed they didn't measure up.

In Kohlberg's view, as individuals mature, their views of morality change. At Stages One and Two, fairness is based on individual needs. For a Stage Three individual, being moral



is an interpersonal matter, equated with helping and pleasing others. At Stage Four, the person subordinates relationships to rules, and at Stages Five and Six, the rules are subordinated to universal principles of justice. Kohlberg found that boys proceeded up his ladder of stages as they matured into men, but many girls, when they reached adulthood, continued to make judgments at Stage Three, putting most of the weight on relationships rather than rules or principles.

Kohlberg came to his conclusion through a series of studies, including one in which adolescents were asked to resolve hypothetical moral conflicts. One conflict was whether a man named Heinz should steal a drug he cannot afford to buy to save his wife's life. Moral maturity, in Kohlberg's view, consists of being able to see the logical priority of life over property.

When Jake, an eleven-year-old boy, was asked to resolve the conflict, he was sure that stealing the drug was appropriate, since "the laws have mistakes, and you can't go writing up a law for everything that you can imagine." In contrast, Amy, an eleven-year-old girl, was sure that "if Heinz and the druggist had talked it out long enough, they could reach something besides stealing." Amy was concerned that "if he stole the drug, he might save his wife then, but if he did, he might go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn't get more of the drug, and it might not be good."

"Both children thus recognize the need for agreement, but see it as mediated in different ways—he impersonally through systems of logic and law, she personally through communication in relationships," observes Gilligan. The boy uses what Gilligan calls a "justice" perspective while the girl uses a "caring" perspective.

The boy and girl see different moral problems, notes Gilligan, "Jake a conflict between life and property that can be resolved by logical deduction, Amy a fracture of human relationship that must be mended by its own thread." According to Gilligan, author of *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press), men

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and women have "two ways of speaking about moral problems, two modes of describing the relationship between other and self."

Rather than dismiss the female approach as inferior, Gilligan sought to explore it, putting together pieces of the puzzle of women's psychology by reassessing previous studies and conducting research of her own.

Gilligan balked at the limitations in previous studies of human development. "Psychological theorists... have tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth," she relates. Gilligan has been able to point to the "integrity and validity" of the female approach to life.

After over a decade of research, Gilligan was able to present a coherent theory of women's psychological development. Women put an emphasis on relationships. For them, responsibility means doing things for others. The developmental struggle for a woman is to recognize that her individual needs are important, too, and to understand that separation does not mean isolation.

In contrast, men fear intimacy and view responsibility as *not doing* what they want because of others. The developmental struggle for a man, says Gilligan, involves "coming to see the other as equal to the self and the dis-

covery that equality provides a way for making the connection safe."

The roots of these contrasting outlooks are in childhood. As infants, both boys and girls have generally had their most intimate relationship with their mothers. Consequently, they develop their sexual identities in relation to their mothers. Girls view

being female as being nurturing like their mothers, while boys see masculinity as being different from their mothers.

"Since masculinity is defined through separateness while femininity is defined through attachment," says Gilligan, "male gender identity is threatened by intimacy, while female gender identity is threatened by separation." Because of their connection and identification with their mothers, women put a continuing value on attachment.

Males tend to view themselves more as individuals, while females view themselves as part of a web of relationships. When eleven-year-old Jake was asked to describe himself, he talked about his abilities, his beliefs, his physical appearance. Amy also talked about her beliefs, but then described herself in relation to others and her responsibility to others. "To Jake's ideal of perfection, against which he measures the worth of himself, Amy counterposes an ideal of care, against which she measures the worth of her activity," says Gilligan.

The "responsible" female.

At all stages in their development, women put an emphasis on their responsibility to other people. In general, females are empathic and avoid hurting other people except for the other's benefit. In the cradle, girl infants are more likely than boy babies to cry (as if in sympathy) when they hear other babies cry. As youngsters, boys tend to draw objects rather than people. In studies of British high school students, girls were more troubled than boys about situations that involved relationships—social and family problems.

Women use aggression in a different way than men do. Studies reveal that men will be aggressive if personally provoked, while women will show aggression if they think some-

one else is being treated unfairly.

Women's responsibility to other people and men's self-protective instinct are both valuable traits. In different situations in life and at different points in any individual's life one might be legitimately emphasized more than the other. Until this decade, the construction of theories of human development has proceeded almost exclusively on an analysis of stereotypically masculine traits.

Not only has the female perspective on life been ignored, but psychologists have paid little attention to evidence that men have, and need, certain traits that are traditionally considered feminine. The boys and men in Gilligan's studies would at times discuss issues from the vantage point of care and responsibility. But just as the perspective of care and responsibility has been ignored by psychological theory-builders when articulated by women, it has also been overlooked when expressed by men.

"When Amy and Jake were interviewed again at age fifteen, they could both approach the Heinz problem in both ways, from the care and justice perspectives," says Gilligan. Ironically, though, Amy's score at age fifteen on Kohlberg's scale was increased—since she had added the masculine viewpoint. But Jake's ability to use the caring perspective gave him no extra points, since the Kohlberg scale does not value it.

Overlap between the sexes.

"There is an interplay of the two approaches, the two moral voices, within each sex," says Gilligan. "The different voice—that of responsibility—is more clearly spoken by women, but it is part of men's experience as well." By overlooking that second voice, current psychological theories "do not describe women's development and may not be a good picture of men's development either."

According to Inge K. Broverman, program director in psychology at the Fielding Institute in Santa Barbara, California, there is an "enormous overlap" between the sexes on traits such as logical ability or nurturance. Yet the importance of logical ability for women or nurturance for men has in the past been underestimated.

Today, however, explains Broverman, "The psychology of sex differ-

ences is changing so that we are no longer trying to make women into men, but are recognizing that women have traits we value."

"The sexes are drawing closer already," says Nicholson. For example, even though women had been assumed to be less assertive, less ambitious, and less career oriented than men, a 1980 study of male and female accountants found remarkable similarities. Women estimated their personal efficacy at the same level men did, and both groups were motivated by the same rewards. In addition, the men showed a concern for "job flexibility," reflecting changing work and family attitudes.

In learning from each other, we should be careful not to pick up each other's worst habits. "Not all traditionally masculine behavior is damaging and not all women's behavior is wonderful," says Nicholson. For example, women's emphasis on the web of relationships may make them overdependent on others or prone to living their lives through others. "Women could afford to be more assertive, to insist that their legitimate rights are respected," says Nicholson. "Similarly, men should learn to be more cooperative and see things from the other person's point of view."

"Woman's place in a man's life cycle has been that of nurturer, caretaker,

and helpmate, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies," notes Carol Gilligan. "But while women have thus taken care of men, men have, in their theories of psychological development as in their economic arrangements, tended to assume or devalue that care."

In a female voice.

Now that the female perspective is beginning to be voiced—its implications are riveting. "To admit the truth of the women's perspective to the conception of moral development is to recognize for both sexes the importance throughout life of the connection between self and other, the universality of the need for compassion and care," writes Gilligan.

In addition to the implications of the female approach for our understanding of people, the female perspective may show us a different view of the world. "Would the world seem entirely different if it were pictured, felt, described, studied, and thought about from the point of view of women?" asked Virginia Held in a recent edition of the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs*.

Held speculated that even our conception of the seemingly objective field of science might be different when viewed through the female mind. She points out that boys group together objects whose intrinsic characteristics are similar—and this is the approach science currently takes as well. In contrast, girls tend to group objects by function, which would provide an alternate tactic for scientific classification.

Consider the benefits of integrating the women's perspectives in the professions. If there was an upsurge in women architects, says Nicholson, "we could expect building to become oriented more to the user than to the designer and to be more flexible."

The study of sex differences is charting a challenging path. From a beginning emphasizing the perceived superiority of the male approach, the research has begun to construct a model of beneficial human traits that combines both male and female perspectives. ●

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How Different Are They?

Test your assumptions about sex differences in infants.

True/False

1. It is easy to tell the sex of a baby by watching how it behaves.
2. Soon after birth, mothers smile, touch, and speak to their baby girls more than to their baby boys.
3. Baby girls smile more.
4. Baby boys are more sensitive to skin contact.
5. Baby boys cry more.
6. There is no difference in how much time boy babies and girl babies spend awake and sleeping.
7. A girl infant is more likely than a boy infant to die before age one.
8. In nursery school, boys and girls are equally courageous.

1. false 2. true 3. true 4. false 5. true
6. true 7. false 8. true