



Handbook of Gender Research in Psychology: Volume 1: Gender Research in General and Experimental Psychology

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Donald R. McCreary and Joan C. Chrisler The Development of Gender Studies in Psychology Studies of sex differences are as old as the field of psychology, and they have been conducted in every subfield of the discipline. There are probably many reasons for the popularity of these studies, but three reasons seem to be most prominent. First, social psychological studies of person perception show that sex is especially salient in social groups. It is the first thing people notice about others, and it is one of the things we remember best (Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske, 1991; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992). For example, people may not remember who uttered a witty remark, but they are likely to remember whether the quip came from a woman or a man. Second, many people hold firm beliefs that aspects of physiology suit men and women for particular social roles. Men's greater upper body strength makes them better candidates for manual labor, and their greater height gives the impression that they would make good leaders (i. e. , people we look up to). Women's reproductive capacity and the caretaking tasks (e. g. , breastfeeding, baby minding) that accompany it make them seem suitable for other roles that require gentleness and nurturance. Third, the logic that underlies hypothesis testing in the sciences is focused on difference. Researchers design their studies with the hope that they can reject the null hypothesis that experimental groups do not differ.

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