

# The Behaviour of People at Work

**Lecture Title: Sex Differences**



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# Course Outline



**Module 1.** About people and about the workplace: the fundamentals



**Module 2.** A trip to the biology department: basics of evolutionary theory



**Module 3.** Focus on the individual: the Central Six and the Big Five personality traits



**Module 4.** A focus on the individual: sex differences



**Module 5.** Emotions at work: the function of coordinating mechanisms



# Module 4:

## A focus on the individual: sex differences

Sex differences and the workplace:

- The nature of sex differences
- Sex differences in personality, skills, emotions, preferences, and more.
- Discrimination on the basis of sex and gender stereotypes
- The working woman effect
- The dilemma of the working mum
- The modern work environment: an evolutionary mismatch
- Sexual harassment





## Focus on the individual

Understanding the differences between the sexes



# “Harmful gender stereotypes” at the workplace

- In 2017, James Damore, a young software engineer was fired from Google after a document he circulated, titled Google’s Ideological Echo Chamber, was leaked.
- In his paper, Damore argued that psychological gender differences could explain why 80% of Google’s engineers, and most of the company’s leaders, are men.
- Damore wrote that women, on average, have “higher levels of neuroticism”, something that may “contribute to the lower number of women in high stress jobs”.
- Damore was fired for “advancing harmful gender stereotypes”, even though his intention was to question Google’s diversity policy.



# A biologist's point of view

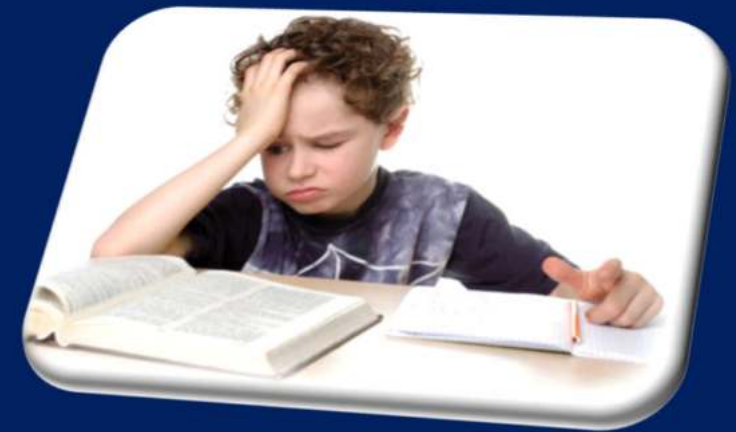
- Admitting that the minds of men and women are not identical in every respect, triggers the fear that different implies unequal, and that men would have to be better, more dominant, or have all the advantage.
- Applying biological thinking, we see things in a different way. From a gene's point of view, being in the body of a male or a female are equally good strategies.
- Is it better to be the size of a male baboon and have six-inch canine teeth or to be the size of a female baboon and not have them? The question is pointless.
- A biologist's point of view is that: it's better to have the male adaptations to deal with male problems, and the female adaptations to deal with female problems.





# Where we are the same and where we are different

- Our average general intelligence is the same, we use language and think about the physical and living world in the same general way.
- Men and women feel the same basic emotions, both enjoy sex, seek intelligent and kind marriage partners, get jealous, make sacrifices for their children, compete for status and mates, and sometimes commit aggression in pursuit of their interests.
- Men have a much stronger taste for no-strings sex with multiple or anonymous partners; are far more likely to compete violently, sometimes lethally; have a much greater ability to manipulate three-dimensional objects and space in the mind.
- Boys are far more likely to be dyslexic, learning disabled, attention deficient, emotional disturbed and mentally retarded. Among talented students in mathematics, boys outnumber girls by 13:1.



# Where we have different selling propositions

- Though men, are on average, better at mentally rotating objects and maps, women are better at remembering landmarks and the positions of objects.
- Men are better throwers, women are more dexterous. Men are better at solving mathematical word problems, women at mathematical calculation.
- Women are more sensitive to sounds and smells, have better depth perception, match shapes faster, and are much better at reading facial expressions and body language.
- Women are better spellers, retrieve words more fluently, and have a better memory for verbal material.





# More differences between the sexes

- Women experience basic emotions more intensely, except, perhaps, anger.
- Women have more intimate social relationships, are more concerned about them, feel more empathy towards their friends (but not strangers), maintain more eye contact, smile and laugh more often.
- Men are likely to compete for status using violence or occupational achievement, women are more likely to use derogation and verbal aggression.
- Men have a higher tolerance for pain and greater willingness to risk life and limb for status, attention and other rewards.
- Women are more attentive to their infants everyday cries. Girls play more at parenting; boys at fighting, chasing and manipulating objects.



# Sex differences in the stress response

- Humans show consistent sex differences in the type of events that elicit a stress response and in how physiology and behaviour are correlated to the response.
- Men tend to show more activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) than women in achievement-related tasks that may trigger status-related motives.
- Women, on the other hand, show a larger HPA activation in situations involving the risk of social failure.



# Different personal preferences and aspirations

- On average, men's self-esteem is more highly tied to their status, salary, wealth, ...
- Men are more keen to work longer hours and to sacrifice other parts of their lives in order to climb the corporate ladder or achieve notoriety in the fields.
- Men are more willing to undergo physical discomfort, are greater risk takers.
- Men prefer to work for corporations; women for government agencies and nonprofit organisations.



*"The question of why more women don't choose careers in engineering has a rather obvious answer: Because they don't want to. Wherever you go, you will find females far less likely than males to see what is so fascinating about ohms, carburetors, or quarks. Reinventing the curriculum will not make me more interested in learning how my dishwasher works."*

Social scientist Patti Hausman

# Discrimination on the basis of sex is an injustice

Of course, just because many sex differences are rooted in biology does not mean that one sex is superior, that the differences will emerge for all people in all circumstances, that discrimination against a person based on sex is justified, or that people should be coerced into doing things typical of their sex. Three points are not in dispute:

- Discouraging women from pursuing their ambitions, and discriminating against them on the basis of their sex, are injustices that should be stopped wherever they are discovered.
- There is no doubt that women faced widespread discrimination in the past and continue to face it in some sectors today.
- There is no question of whether women are “qualified” to be scientists, CEOs, leaders of nations, or elite professionals of any other kind. Some are and some aren’t, just as some men are qualified and some aren’t.



# The trouble with stereotypes

- The differences between men and women are differences of degree, not kind.
- Even in the most male-advantaged tasks (running a marathon or weight-lifting), there are always some women who do better than the less able men (and vice versa). This is also true of psychological characteristics.
- The trouble with stereotypes, therefore, is that they may cause us to debar entry on the basis of sex. For example, denying women the opportunity to be firefighters or police officers is rationalised on the grounds of women's lesser strength or endurance. But this is clearly wrong. The criteria should be the individual's actual ability to perform the tasks that the job entails.





# Depending on the economy and the labour market

- In a free and unprejudiced labour market, people will be hired and paid according to the match between their traits and the demands of the job.
- A given job requires a mixture of cognitive talents (such as mathematical or linguistic), personality traits (such as risk taking or cooperation), and tolerance of lifestyle demands (rigid schedules, relocations, updating job skills).
- Given the evidence for sex differences (some biological, some cultural, some both) the statistical distributions of men and women in these strengths and dispositions are unlikely to be identical.
- It all depends on the menu of opportunities that a given society makes available.





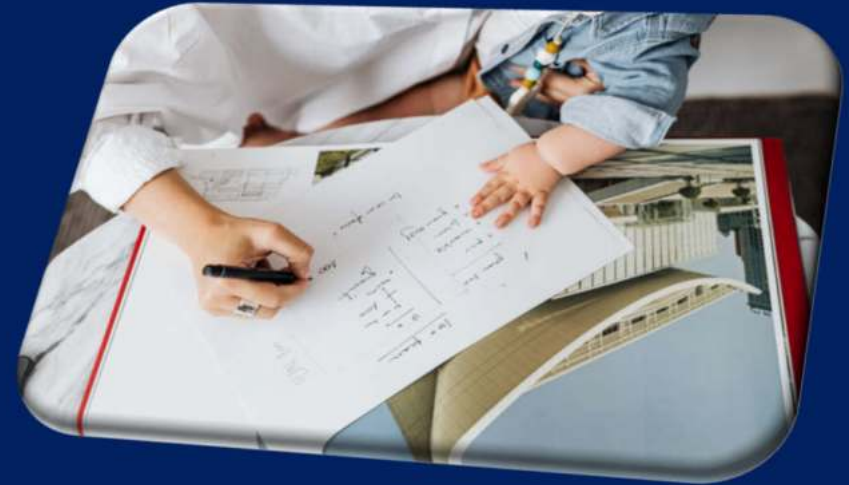
# The “working woman effect”

- Women’s workforce participation decreases the time available for investing in children. This is the “working woman effect” on family size.
- The more the woman earns, the longer she and her husband have spent in further education and the later they began having children.
- This means that her reproductive life is shortened and the time commitment she invests in work decreases her ability to cope with more children.
- In hunter-gatherer societies there is no real conflict between mothering and “working”: they are a seamless whole. A woman may be pounding maize, weaving baskets, or foraging for tubers but she can monitor her children or carry them with her.



# The dilemma of the working mum

- In our society, women face an emotional choice between the home and the workplace – witness the distress that women feel as they hand over their baby for the first time to the care of paid strangers.
- Employed mothers' feelings of loss and guilt are concealed because they are incompatible with effective performance in the workplace.
- Women employees who do not show the ruthless drive of their male counterparts are disparaged as poor role models and blamed for their sex's failure to break through the glass ceiling.



# Going out to work

- Research about how our hunter-gatherer ancestors lived tells us that both sexes had “jobs” outside the home. Men did most of the hunting, women did most of the gathering.
- The practice of going out to work in an office or a factory is foreign and novel to the psychology of a savanna-dwelling ape. It is just as foreign to a man as to a woman.
- If in the Pleistocene period men went off from the home base on long hunts while women went a shorter distance to gather plants, then maybe men are mentally better suited to long commutes.
- But neither is evolutionary suited to sit at a desk all day and talk into a telephone or sit at a factory bench all day tightening screws.



# “Work” and “home”

- The fact that “work” became a male thing and “home” a female one is an accident of history.
- The domestication of cattle and the invention of the plow made food gathering a task that benefited from male muscle power. In societies where the land is tilled by hand, women do most of the work.
- The industrial revolution reinforced the trend, but the post industrial revolution – the recent growth of service industries – started to reverse it back again. In fact, women are going “out to work” again as they did when they sought tubers and berries in the Pleistocene period.



# No reason for sexism

- Therefore there is absolutely no justification from evolutionary biology for the view that men should earn and women should darn their socks.
- There may be professions, such as car mechanic or big-game hunter, that men are psychologically more suited to than women, just as there are professions, such as doctor and nanny, that women are probably naturally better at.
- But there is no general support in biology for sexism about careers.
- Indeed in a curious way, an evolutionary perspective justifies affirmative action more than a more egalitarian philosophy would, because it implies that women have different ambitions and abilities.





# Climbing political hierarchies

- Men's reproductive success depended for generations on climbing political hierarchies.
- Women have rarely had an incentive to seek success of that kind, for their reproductive success depended on other things.
- Therefore, evolutionary thinking predicts that women often will not seek to climb political ladders, but it says nothing about how good they would be if they did.
- The evidence suggests that women are on average slightly better than men are at running countries.
- The evidence also supports the assertion that females bring a different kind of value to organisations – intuition, character judgement, lack of self-worship.





# The modern work environment: an evolutionary mismatch

- Modern work environments differ dramatically from those of our ancestral past.
- Although a few professions are heavily dominated by one sex – such as home healthcare providers (89% women), social services workers (85% women), and brick masons, concrete workers, and auto mechanics (all more than 99% men) – many modern workplaces are sexually integrated.
- Modern universities and workplaces in fields such as publishing, the news, and the movie business all contain large numbers of young women and often somewhat older men who work together. Combining a large pool of young women with a smaller pool of senior men, as often occurs in some business sectors, produces an evolutionary mismatch.



# Mating psychology and sexual harassment

- Evolved mating psychology illuminates why. As men get older, they are attracted to women who are increasingly younger than they are.
- Young women occasionally reciprocate that attraction, but rarely as the age gap exceeds a decade, although of course there are exceptions.
- So in these workplace contexts, many men are attracted to women who are not attracted to them.
- Most men do not act on their attractions. In fact, most instances of sexual harassment are perpetrated by a minority of men who serially harass.



# Workplace sexual harassment policies

- Stricter workplace sexual harassment policies can help deter these men so that the burden of dealing with unwanted sexual attention does not fall unfairly on women, as it has traditionally.
- Like stalking laws, sexual harassment laws typically require a repeated pattern of behaviour rather than a single instance, unless the instance is particularly severe, although increasingly strict internal company policies often have tougher standards.
- And like stalking laws, sexual harassment violations are partly defined by the psychological state of the victim – the behaviour typically must be seen as unwelcome or offensive to quality.



*A persistent pattern of flirting with a co-worker or complimenting them on their appearance, for example, qualifies as sexual harassment if it is unwelcome, but not if the receiver feels indifferent or flattered by the comments.*

## The Behaviour of People at Work



Thank You!





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