Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation

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Abstract

Human differentiation on the basis of gender is a fundamental phenomenon that affects virtually every aspect of people’s daily lives. This article presents the social cognitive theory of gender-role development and functioning. It specifies how gender conceptions are constructed from the complex mix of experiences and how they operate in concert with motivational and self-regulatory mechanisms to guide gender-linked conduct throughout the life course. The theory integrates psychological and sociostructural determinants within a unified conceptual structure. From this theoretical perspective, gender conceptions and roles are the product of a broad network of social influences operating interdependently in a variety of societal subsystems. Human evolution provides bodily structures and biological potentialities that permit a range of possibilities rather than dictate a fixed type of gender differentiation. People contribute to their self-development and bring about social changes that define and structure gender relationships through their agentic actions within the related systems of influence.

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1. Introduction

The present article addresses the psychosocial determinants and mechanisms by which society socializes male and female infants into masculine and feminine adults. Gender development is a fundamental issue because some of the most important aspects of people’s lives, such as the talents they cultivate, the conceptions they hold of themselves and others, the sociostructural opportunities and constraints they encounter, and the social and occupational pathways they pursue are heavily prescribed by societal gender-typing. It is the primary basis on which people’s diverse and often pervasive effects on their daily lives. Gender differentiation takes on added importance because many of the attributes and roles selectively promoted in males and females tend to be differentially valued with those ascribed to males generally being regarded as more desirable, effectual and of higher status (Berscheid, 1993). Although some gender differences are biologically founded, most of the stereotypic attributes and roles linked to gender arise more from cultural design than from biological endowment (Epstein, 1997).
2. Main Text

- **Social Cognitive Theory**

  Social cognitive theory acknowledges the influential role of evolutionary factors in human adaptation and change, but rejects one-sided evolutionism in which social behavior is the product of evolved biology, but social and technological innovations that create new environmental selection pressures for being adaptive have no effect on biological evolution (Bandura, 1999). In the bidirectional view of evolutionary processes, evolutionary pressures fostered changes in bodily structures and upright posture conducive to the development and use of tools, which enabled an organism to manipulate, alter and construct new environmental conditions. Environmental innovations of increasing complexity, in turn, created new selection pressures for the evolution of specialized biological systems for functional consciousness, thought, language and symbolic communication.

  Social cognitive theory addresses itself to a number of distinctive human attributes (Bandura, 1986). The remarkable capability for symbolization provides a powerful tool for comprehending the environment and for creating and regulating environmental conditions that touch virtually every aspect of life. Another distinctive attribute is the advanced capability for observational learning that enables people to expand their knowledge and skills rapidly through information conveyed by modeling influences without having to go through the tedious and hazardous process of learning by response consequences.

  The self-regulatory capability, rooted in internal standards and self-reactive influence, provides another distinctive attribute for the exercise of self-directedness. The self-reflective capability to evaluate the adequacy of one's thinking and actions, and to judge one's agentic efficacy to produce effects by one's actions also receive prominent attention in social cognitive theory. The evolved information processing systems provide the capacity for the very characteristics that are distinctly human—generative symbolization, forethought, evaluative self-regulation, reflective self-consciousness, and symbolic communication. Evolved morphology and special purpose systems facilitate acquisition processes. Social cognitive theory does not assume an equipotential mechanism of learning (Bandura, 1986). In addition to biological biases, some things are more easily learnable because the properties of the events can facilitate or impede acquisition processes through attention, representational, production, and motivational means.

  Human evolution provides bodily structures and biological potentialities not behavioral dictates. Sociostructural influences operate through these biological resources in the construction and regulation of human behavior in the service of diverse purposes. Having evolved advanced biological capacities can be used to create diverse cultures—aggressive ones, pacific ones, egalitarian ones, or autocratic ones. As Gould (1987) notes, biology sets constraints that vary in nature, degree and strength across different spheres of functioning, but in most domains the biology of humans permits a broad range of cultural possibilities. He argues cogently that evidence favours a potential view over a determinist view of nature. He makes the further interesting point that biological determinism is often clothed in the language of interactionism: The bidirectional biology-culture coevolution is acknowledged but then the major causation of human behavior is ascribed to evolved biology. The cultural side of this two-way causation, in which genetic make-up is shaped by the adaptation pressures of socially constructed environments, receives little notice. Biological determinism is also often clothed in the language of changeability: The malleability of evolved dispositions is acknowledged but determinative potency is then ascribed to them with caution against efforts to change existing sociostructural arrangements and practices allegedly ruled by evolved dispositions because such efforts are doomed to failure. The conception of the operational nature of human nature affects the relative explanatory weight given to genetic mismatch and to the counterforce of entrenched vested interests for resistance to sociostructural changes. Biological determinists favor heavily the rule of nature, whereas biological potentials see human nature as permitting a range of possibilities that gives greater saliency to the rule of distributed opportunities, privileges and power.

  Theories that heavily attribute human social behavior to the rule of nature are disputed by the remarkable cultural diversity. Consider aggression, which is presumably genetically programmed as a biological universal and more so for males than for females. We will see later that gender differences in aggression are much smaller than claimed and further shrink under certain environmental conditions.

  A biologically deterministic view has problems not only with cultural diversity, but with the rapid pace of social change. The process of biological selection moves at a snail’s pace, whereas societies have been undergoing major changes in sexual mores, family structures, social and occupational roles and institutional practices. In the past, a
great deal of gender differentiation arose from the biological requirement of women bearing children and caring for them over a good part of their lives. With marked reductions in infant mortality and family size, and technical innovations of household labor-saving devices, women spend only a small portion of their expanded life span in childbearing and rearing. Contraceptive devices provide them with considerable control over their reproductive life. For these and other reasons, educational and occupational pursuits are no longer thwarted by prolonged childbearing demands as they did in the past. Inequitable social constraints and opportunity structures are being changed by social means rather than by reliance on the slow protracted process of biological selection. Dobzhansky (1972) reminds us that the human species has been selected for learnability and plasticity of behavior adaptive to diverse habitats and socially constructed environments, not for behavioral fixedness. The pace of social change gives testimony that biology, indeed, permits a range of possibilities.

The sections that follow present the basic structure of social cognitive theory, the main determinants it posits and the mechanisms through which they operate. Later sections address the applications of the theory to the various aspects of gender-role development and functioning. In social cognitive theory, gender development is neither totally shaped nor regulated by environmental forces or by socially non-situated intra-psychic processes. Rather, gender development is explained in terms of triadic reciprocal causation.

• Causal Structure

In the model of triadic reciprocal causation, personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behavior patterns; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectional (Bandura, 1986). The personal contribution includes gender-linked conceptions, behavioral and judgmental standards and self-regulatory influences; behavior refers to activity patterns that tend to be linked to gender; and the environmental factor refers to the broad network of social influences that are encountered in everyday life.

The model of triadic reciprocal differs from those favored by cognitive developmental theory and gender schema theory in that factors apart from cognitive ones are accorded considerable importance. Motivational, affective, and environmental factors are included as determinants of gender development and functioning as well as a broader array of cognitive factors than gender schematic and stereotypic knowledge. Moreover, which cognitions come into play and the strength of their influence on gender-linked behavior is dependent on the particular constellation of environmental influences operating in a given situation.

• Environmental Structures

The environment is not a monolithic entity disembodied from personal agency. Social cognitive theory distinguishes among three types of environmental structures (Bandura, 1997). They include the imposed environment, selected environment, and constructed environment. Gradations of environmental changeability require the exercise of increasing levels of personal agency. In the case of the imposed environment, certain physical and sociostructural conditions are thrust upon people whether they like it or not. Although they have little control over its presence, people have ways in how they construe it and react to it. Thus, for example, school attendance and academic curricula are mandated for children regardless of their personal preferences. Some of the environmental impositions involve constraints, as when women were disenfranchised and prohibited from certain social, educational, and occupational pursuits or membership in certain social organizations.

There is a major difference between the potential environment and the environment people actually experience. For the most part, the environment is only a potentiality with different rewarding and punishing aspects that do not come into being until the environment is selected and activated by appropriate courses of action. Which part of the potential environment becomes the actual experienced environment thus depends on how people behave. This constitutes the selected environment. The choice of associates, activities, and educational pursuits are examples of environmental selectivity that affect developmental pathways (Bullock & Merrill, 1980; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

• Socio cognitive Modes of Influence

Gendered roles and conduct involve intricate competencies, interests and value orientations. A comprehensive theory of gender differentiation must, therefore, explain the determinants and mechanisms through which gender-linked roles and conduct are acquired. In social cognitive theory, gender development is promoted by three major
modes of influence and the way in which the information they convey is cognitively processed. The first mode is through modeling. A great deal of gender-linked information is exemplified by models in one's immediate environment such as parents and peers, and significant persons in social, educational and occupational contexts. In addition, the mass media provides pervasive modeling of gendered roles and conduct. The second mode is through enactive experience. It relies on discerning the gender-linkage of conduct from the outcomes resulting from one's actions. Gender-linked behavior is heavily socially sanctioned in most societies. Therefore, evaluative social reactions are important sources of information for constructing gender conceptions.

People have views about what is appropriate conduct for each of the two sexes. The third mode of influence is through direct tuition. It serves as a convenient way of informing people about different styles of conduct and their linkage to gender. Moreover, it is often used to generalize the information of specific modeled exemplars and particular behavioral outcome experiences.

The relative impact of the three modes of influence varies depending on the developmental status of individuals and the social structuring of experiences. Therefore, some modes of influence are more influential at certain periods of development than at others. Modeling is omnipresent from birth. Infants are highly attentive to modeling influences and can learn from them, especially in interactive contexts (Bandura, 1976; Uzgiris & Kuper, 1992). As children gain mobility and competencies to act on the environment they begin enacting behavior that is socially linked to gender and experiencing social reactions. They regulate their behavior accordingly. As they acquire linguistic skills, people begin to explain to children what appropriate gendered conduct is for them.

The rate of acquisition varies depending on the mode of influence. Learning conceptions through modeling is faster than from enactive experience (Bandura, 1986; Debowski, Wood, & Bandura, 1999). In modeling, the gendered attributes are already clustered in a structured form. In enactive learning, response outcomes serve as an unarticulated way of informing performers of what constitutes appropriate patterns of behavior. This is a much more laborious attribute abstraction process. In the enactive mode, conceptions of gendered conduct must be constructed gradually by observing the differential outcomes of one's actions. If people fail to recognize the effects their actions produce, or inadequately process the outcome information provided by variations in actions over time and social contacts, they do not learn much, although the consequences repeatedly impinge on them.

Tuition also presents the role behavior in integrated form, but its instructional function is weakened by the abstractness and the complexity of language, especially for young children. Verbal instruction alone, therefore, has less impact on conception acquisition than does modeling (Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978). However, as previously noted, tuition can help to generalize learning from enactive and modeling experiences by adding generic significance to particular exemplars and outcomes.

These different modes of influence operate in complexly interactive ways. For the most part, they are oriented toward promoting the traditional forms of gendered conduct. However, because of the changing views on gender in some quarters, there is increasing diversity in the different sources of influence, which do not always operate in concert (Bandura, 1986; Lorber, 1994). There are differences within and between parents, peers, teachers and the media in the gendered styles of behavior they promote and between what they preach and practice. Gender development is thus framed forward under conditions of high social consensus concerning gendered conduct and roles. Disparity of influence complicates the development of personal standards of conduct (Bandura, 1986; McManis & Lieberman, 1968; Rosenblum, 1968).

The different forms of social influence affect four major aspects of gender-role development and functioning. These affect the development of gender-linked knowledge and competencies, and the three major sociocognitive regulators of gendered conduct. These include outcome expectations concerning gendered conduct and roles, self-evaluative standards, and self-efficacy beliefs.

- **Modeling Influences in Gender Development**

  Modeling is one of the most pervasive and powerful means of transmitting values, attitudes, and patterns of thought and behavior (Bandura, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978). Modeling is not simply a process of response mimicry as commonly believed. Modeled activities convey the rules and structures embodied in the exemplars for generative behavior. This higher level of learning is achieved through abstract modeling. Rule-governed action patterns differ in specific content and other details but they embody the same underlying rule. Once observers extract the rules and structure underlying the modeled activities they can generate new patterns of behavior that conform to the structural properties but go beyond what they have seen or heard. Hence, social
cognitive theory characterizes learning from exemplars as modeling rather than imitation, which has come to mean just mimicking the particular action exemplified. Modeling serves a variety of functions in gender development. Consider first the vicarious acquisition function.

The discussion thus far has focused on factors that regulate attention orientations and processes. People cannot be much influenced by modeled events if they do not remember them. A second major sub function governing observational learning concerns cognitive representational processes. Retention involves an active process of transforming and restructuring information about events for memory representation in the form of rules and conceptions of styles of behavior. Retention is greatly enhanced by symbolic transformation of modeled information into memory codes and cognitive rehearsal of the representations (Carroll & Bandura, 1971). Preconceptions and affective states exert biasing influences on these representational processes as well. Similarly, recall involves a process of reconstruction rather than simply retrieval of registered events.

Symbolic representation and rehearsal of modeled activities not only enhance acquisition of competencies, but raise perceived self-efficacy to execute the activities successfully (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Clark, 1960; Kazdin, 1979). Such boosts in perceived self-efficacy improve performance by reducing self-imperiling thought processes and by enlisting and sustaining the motivation needed to succeed.

The third sub function governing observational learning involves behavioral production processes whereby symbolic conceptions are translated into appropriate courses of action. This is achieved through a conception-matching process in which conceptions guide the construction and execution of styles of behavior and the adequacy of the behavior is judged through comparison against the conceptual model (Carroll & Bandura, 1990). The behavior is then modified, if necessary, based on the comparison information to achieve close fit of conception to action.

The fourth sub function in modeling concerns motivational processes. Social cognitive theory distinguishes between acquisition and performance of given styles of conduct because people do not perform everything they learn. For example, boys learn a lot about the homemaking role through repeated maternal modeling but rarely adopt such activities in their everyday life. When children are exposed to aggressive models, boys adopt that style of behavior more extensively than do girls. But tests of acquisition reveal few, if any, sex differences in the degree to which they learned the modeled patterns of behavior (Bandura, 1965).

**Motivational, Emotional and Valuation Effects of Modeling**

In addition to promoting differential styles of behavior, modeling influences can alter incentive motivation (Bandura, 1986). Seeing others achieve valued outcomes by their efforts can instill motivating outcome expectancies in observers that they can secure similar benefits for comparable performances. Modeled performance outcomes thus create incentives and disincentives for action. By the same token, seeing others punished for engaging in certain activities can instill negative outcome expectations that serve as disincentives. These motivational effects rest on observers’ judgments that they have the efficacy to produce the modeled performances and that comparable behavior will bring them similar outcomes.

People are easily aroused by the emotional expressions of others. What gives significance to vicarious emotional influence is that observers can acquire lasting attitudes, and emotional and behavioral proclivities toward persons and activities that have been associated with modeled emotional experiences (Bandura, 1992). They learn to fear things that frightened the models, to dislike what repulsed them, and to like what gratified them. Fears and behavioral restraints are reduced by modeling influences that convey information about coping strategies for exercising control over threats. The stronger the instilled sense of coping efficacy, the bolder the behavior (Bandura, 1997a; Williams, 1992). Values can similarly be developed and altered vicariously by repeated exposure to modeled preferences (Bandura, 1986).

The actions of models can also serve as social prompts for previously learned behavior. The influence of models in activating, channeling, and supporting social behavior is abundantly documented in both laboratory and field studies (Bandura, 1986; Rosenthal, 1984). Thus, the types of models that prevail in a given social milieu partly determine which personal qualities, from among many alternatives, are selectively expressed.

Social modeling operates at the collective level as well as individually. Modeling is a major social mechanism through which behavioral patterns, social roles and sociostructural arrangements get replicated across generations (Bandura, 1986). But modeling contributes to cultural evolution as well as to cultural transfer. When exposed to models that differ in their styles of thinking and behavior, observers rarely pattern their behavior exclusively after a
single source, nor do they adopt all the attributes even of preferred models. Rather, observers typically combine various aspects of different models into new amalgams that differ from the individual sources (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963b). Because observers vary in what they adopt from the social diversity they observe, different observers create new blends of characteristics.

Boyd and Richerson (1985) analyze the mechanisms of cultural evolution from a population view of social learning. Within their conceptual framework, multiple modeling influences, environmental conditions, and personal experiences operate interactively to change the distribution of cultural behavioral variants over time and to foster convergence toward variants that are especially efficacious in particular milieus. The different ways in which social learning influences favor some behavioral variants over others receive detailed consideration within the social cognitive theory of social diffusion of innovations (Bandura, 1986). Moreover, symbolic modeling is a consequential vehicle of rapid social change in contrast to the slower pace of incremental change (Bandura, 1997; Smith, 1994). Challengers of inequitable social practices are enabled and motivated by the modeled successes of others who, under subordinating conditions, altered institutional practices by concerted collective action that changed the rules for the better.

- **Enactive Experience**

  People differ in how they respond to the same gender-linked conduct displayed by children. They can develop and refine gendered orientations by observing the positive and negative consequences accompanying different patterns of behavior. Moreover, some people are more concerned and reactive to gender-linked conduct. Fathers, for example, react more negatively than mothers to their sons’ feminine toy play (Idle, Wood & Desmarais, 1993). The wider the array of people and social systems those children are exposed to and interact with, the more diverse the arrays of outcomes they experience for various types of gender-linked conduct. The same behavior can meet with different reactions from different people and in different contexts within the child’s social milieu. Children extract, weigh and integrate this diverse outcome information in constructing guides for conduct.

- **Direct Tuition**

  Gender roles and conduct can be affected by direct tutoring as well as through modeling and social evaluative reactions. In this mode of influence, gender conceptions are drawn from the tutelage of persons in one’s social environment. As in other forms of influence, direct tuition is most effective when it is based on shared values and receives widespread social support. Models, of course, do not often practice what they preach. The impact of tuition is weakened when what is being taught is contradicted by what is modeled (Hildebrandt, Feldman, & Ditrichs, 1973; McManis & Liebert, 1968; Rosenhan, et al., 1968). Discordances between the style of behavior modeled by adults and peers add further to the complexity of modeling processes (Bandura, Grusec, & Menlove, 1967). Children vary in the relative weight they give to the divergent sources of influence.

  As is evident from the preceding analysis, people do not passively absorb gender role conceptions from whatever influences happen to impinge upon them. Rather they construct generic conceptions from the diversity of styles of conduct that are modeled, evaluated prescribed and taught by different individuals or by even the same person for different activities in different contexts. The development of gender role conceptions is a construction rather than simply a wholesale incorporation of what is socially transmitted.

- **Regulators of Gendered Conduct and Role Behavior**

  The discussion thus far has centered on the acquisition of gender conceptions and competencies. This is only part of the theoretical framework. Social cognitive theory also addresses the factors that regulate gender-linked conduct and how their relative influence changes developmentally. These factors include self-regulatory mechanisms rooted in social sanctions and self-sanction (Bandura, 1986). In addition, self-efficacy beliefs play a pivotal role in both the acquisition and regulation of gendered roles and styles of conduct.

- **Self-Categorization and Acquisition of Gender-Role Knowledge**

  As children become more cognitively adept, their knowledge of gender extends beyond nonverbal categorization of people and objects, to explicit labeling of people, objects, and styles of behavior according to gender. As children begin to comprehend speech, they notice that verbal labeling in masculine and feminine terms is used extensively by those around them. It does not take them long to learn that children are characterized as boys and girls, and adults as
mothers and fathers, women, and men. Gender labeling gives salience not only to sorting people on the basis of gender but also aggregates the features and activities that characterize each gender.

We saw earlier that gender labeling takes on considerable importance because a great deal depends on it. It not only highlights gender as an important category for viewing the world, but as the basis for categorizing oneself. Once such self-categorization occurs the label takes on added significance, especially as children increasingly recognize that the social world around them is heavily structured around this categorical differentiation. One's gender status makes a big difference. It carries enormous significance not only for dress and play, but the skills cultivated, the occupations pursued, the functions performed in family life, and the nature of one's social roles and social relationships.

Social cognitive theory posits that, through cognitive processing of direct and vicarious experiences, children come to categorize themselves as girls or boys, gain substantial knowledge of gender attributes and roles, and extract rules as to what types of behavior are considered appropriate for their gender. However, unlike the gender constancy and schema theories, it does not invest gender conceptions with automatic directive and motivating properties. Acquiring a conception of gender and valuing the attributes defining that conception are separable processes governed by different determinants. In the preceding sections, we have seen how self-regulatory mechanisms operate through perceived self-efficacy, anticipated social sanctions, self-sanction, and perceived impediments rather than gender labeling itself motivating and guiding gender-linked conduct.

Just as having a conception of one's own gender does not drive one to personify the stereotype it embraces, nor does the self-conception of gender necessarily create positive projection of the attributes and roles traditionally associated with it. Both the valuation of certain attributes and roles and the eagerness to adopt them are influenced by the value society places on them. Societies that subordinate women may not only devalue their own gender identity. Boys clearly favor male models, but girls, who are fully cognizant of their gender constancy, do not display the exclusive same-gender modeling as the cognitive theories would have us believe (Bussey & Bandura, 1984; Frey & Ruble, 1992; Luecke-Aleksa, Anderson, Collins, & Smith, 1995; Slaby & Frey, 1975). For boys there is little conflict between the socialization missions and gender and societal valuation of it. For girls, however, although they may value being a girl and gender-linked attributes, they very early recognize the differential societal valuation of male and female roles (Kuhn, Nash, & Brucken, 1978; Meyer, 1980). Consequently, women have some incentive to attempt to raise their status by mastering activities and interests traditionally typed as masculine. Even at the preschool level, girls show greater modeling after the other gender than do boys.

In the social sphere, there are large gender differences in the modeling of aggression, which is widely regarded as a principal attribute of maleness. The high rate of aggressive modeling by males is not lost on boys. Even at the very young age preschool boys are highly adopters of modeled styles of aggression than girls, and even more so if it is modeled by males than by females (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963a). In their spontaneous comments in the latter studies, the children expressed in no uncertain terms the inappropriateness of a woman behaving aggressively "Who is that lady. That's not the way for a lady to behave. Ladies are supposed to act like ladies ...." "You should have seen what that girl did in there. She was just acting like a man. I never saw a girl act like that before. She was punching and fighting but not crying." In contrast, the male's aggressiveness was admired by both the boys ("Al's a good soccer, he beat up Bobo. He's not so squeamish like Al.") and the girls ("That man is a strong fighter, he punched and punched and he could throw Bobo right out to the floor and if Bobo got up he said, 'Punch your nose.' He's a good fighter like Daddy") (Bandura et al., 1961, p. 581). It is not as though boys are preordained for aggressive modeling, however. We have seen that the models behaving nonaggressive in the presence of provocative cues, boys decrease their aggressiveness (Bandura et al., 1961).

Although boys are more inclined than girls to adopt modeled aggressive styles of behavior, the differences reflect primarily differential restraint rather than differential acquisition. When girls are offered positive incentives to reproduce the novel patterns of aggression they saw modeled, the results show that girls learn just about as much as boys from the aggressive models (Bandura, 1965).

In their analyses of the mass media, Gerbner and his colleagues document that televised dramas reflect the ideological orientations and power relations in the society (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1986). The basic messages they convey shape public images of reality. In the gendered portrayals of aggression in adult relationships, men are usually the aggressors, whereas women are more often helpless victims (Gerbner, 1972; Milkie, 1994). When women do aggress, they are more likely to get punished for it than are men. Gerbner suggests that repeated exposure to such power scenarios reinforces public views that can contribute to the subordination of women.
In the televised world, men wield aggressive power extensively, but in the everyday world most people do not go around assaulting each other. Of those who resort to aggressive conduct, males are generally more directly aggressive than females, although the difference is much smaller than is commonly believed and further diminishes with age, under conditions of provocation, and in the presence of aggressive cues (Bettencourt & Kernahan, 1997; Bettencourt & Miller, 1996; Hyde, 1984). In accord with social cognitive theory (Perry, Perry & Boldizar, 1990), gender differences vary depending on the anticipated consequences of aggression. Both the anticipated personal and social sanctions for aggression differ depending on sex status (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Girls expect stronger parental and peer disapproval for aggression and greater self-censure for such conduct (Perry, Perry, & Woods, 1989). As a consequence, girls make greater use than boys of indirect means of aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Gender differences in aggressiveness also partly reflect differences in perceived self-regulatory efficacy. Girls exhibit a significantly higher sense of efficacy to resist peer pressure to engage in untoward conduct, a difference that is replicated cross-nationally (Pastorelli, et al., 1997). Moreover, boys are more facile in disengaging social self-sanctions from injurious conduct than are girls. The higher the moral disengagement, the greater the involvement in antisocial conduct.

The Gendered Practices of Occupational Systems

Occupational activities make up a major part of daily living and serve as an important source of personal identity. The gendered practices of familial, educational, peer, and media subsystems are essentially replicated in organizational structures and practices. These include extensive segregation of jobs along gender lines, concentration of women in lower-level positions, inequitable wages, limited opportunities for upper-level mobility, and power imbalances in work relationships which erect barriers to equitable participation in organizational activities (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Stockard & Johnson, 1991).

It will be recalled from earlier analyses that, based on the patterning of perceived efficacy for different occupational pursuits, women tend to gravitate toward female-dominated occupations and shun male-dominated ones (Lent et al, 1994). The interplay of personal and situational impediments create disparity in the distribution of women and men across occupations that differ in prestige, status, and monetary return. All too often, this leads to devaluation not only of women's work but of the "feminized" occupations as well (Reskin, 1991). When wives and husbands work in tandem, a now quite familiar pattern: the women's occupational pursuit tends to be regarded as a secondary career designed mainly to supplement the household income.

The recent years have witnessed vast changes in the roles women perform, but the sociostructural practices lag far behind (Bandura, 1997; Bettencourt, Kahn, & Foner, 1994). Low birthrate and increased longevity creates the need for purposeful pursuits that provide satisfaction to one's life long after the offspring have left home (Astin, 1984). Women are educating themselves more extensively, which creates a wider array of options than was available for women in the past. Women are entering the workforce in large numbers not just for economic reasons but as a matter of personal satisfaction and identity. Many have the personal efficacy, competencies and interests to achieve distinguished careers in occupations traditionally dominated by men. While the constraints to gaining entry into such careers have declined, many impediments remain to achieving progress within them (Jacobs, 1989).

Social change in organizational practices does not come easy because beneficiaries build the privileges into protective organizational processes and structures (Bandura, 1997). We have previously noted that, in earlier phases of development, the social pressures for gender differentiation are stronger for boys than for girls. Hence, girls are more apt to pursue activities considered appropriate for boys than boy's willingness to adopt activities socially linked to girls. However, women's efforts to gain full acceptance in the workplaces of high status have met substantial resistance. Women in traditionally male occupations are evaluated more negatively than women in traditionally female occupations or men in occupations dominated by women (Pfost & Fiore, 1990). They are not viewed as positively or as competent as men of comparable skill in the same positions (Alban-Metcalfe & West, 1991; Paludi & Strayer, 1985). They receive less support from peers and mentors than do male employees (Alban-Metcalfe & West, 1991; Davidson & Cooper, 1984). They are excluded from informal networks and activities where important information is exchanged and business transactions are conducted (Kanter, 1977). They experience more impediments to advancement to the higher managerial ranks in the organizational structure (Jacobs, 1989). Reskin (1991) comments insightfully on the organizational processes through which those in positions of power thwart challenges to their advantaged positions. She notes that women often had to turn to courts to achieve a more equitable environment for their development and occupational advancement.
Changing gender roles poses challenges on how to strike a balance between family and job demands for women who enter the workforce. The effects of juggling dual roles are typically framed negatively on how competing interrole demands breed distress and discordance. Much has been written on the negative spillover that women’s job pressures have on family life but little on how job satisfaction may enhance family life. Research by Ozer (1995) speaks to this issue. Married women who pursued professional, managerial, and technical occupations were tested before the birth of their first child for their perceived self-efficacy to manage the demands of their family and occupational life. Their physical and psychological well-being and the strain they experienced over their dual roles were measured after they had returned to work. Neither the family income, occupational workload, nor the division of childcare responsibility directly affected women’s well-being or emotional strain over dual roles. These factors were contributors but they operated through their effects on perceived self-efficacy. Women who had a strong sense of coping efficacy (i.e. that they can manage the multiple demands of family and work, exert some influence over their work schedules, and get their husbands to help with various aspects of child care) experienced a low level of physical and emotional strain, good health, and a more positive sense of well-being.

Although the women in the above study contributed approximately half the family income, they bore most of the homemaking and childcare responsibilities, as is the common organization of domestic life. The division of household labor and organizational arrangements to promote sharing of family responsibilities lag far behind the changing family pattern in which both spouses are employed. Gender differentiation shapes the research agenda on the management of dual roles. Numerous studies examine how social support of the home buffers working fathers against the stressors of the workplace, but there is a glaring absence of research on how fathers juggle the dual demands of the workplaces and housework and childcare.

More equitable systems require personal as well as sociostructural changes. Given the pervasive negative sanctions for males performing domestic activities from the symbolic play in childhood to adulthood, these gender socialization practices produce males with low perceived efficacy to manage competently the combined demands of job and parenthood (Stickel & Bonett, 1991). Most evade the difficulties of juggling these dual roles by staying clear of housework and childcare.

Human stress is widely viewed as the emotional strain that arises when perceived task demands exceed perceived capability to manage them. Matsui and Onglatco (1992) show that what is experienced as an occupational stressor depends partly on level of perceived self-efficacy. Women employees who have a low sense of efficacy are stressed by heavy work demands and role responsibilities. By contrast, those with a high sense of efficacy are frustrated and stressed by limited opportunities to make full use of their talents. A work life of blocked opportunities, thwarted aspirations and personal nonfulfillment that takes up most of one’s daily living can be a source of misery.

- **Interdependence of Gender Socializing Subsystems**

  The research reviewed in the preceding sections documents the influential role played by each of the various societal subsystems in the differentiation of gender attributes and roles. In social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; 1999), human development and functioning are highly socially interdependent, richly contextualized and conditionally manifested. In everyday life these different subsystem sources of influence operate interdependently rather than isolated. The multi-causal and reciprocal of influences adds greatly to the complexity of disentangling functional processes and their changing dynamics over the course of development. Further progress in understanding the sources, social functions, and personal and social effects of gender differentiation will require greater effort to clarify the complex interplay of the various subsystems of influence within the larger societal context. However, people are not simply the products of social forces acting upon them. In the triadic reciprocal posited by social cognitive theory, people contribute to their self-development and social change through their agentic actions within the interrelated systems of influence.

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