

GENDER MATTERS

Examining Concepts and Theories Teaching Guide

Video Summary

This video describes how the **concepts and theories** used in psychology may reflect gender norms and assumptions, how to detect this, and how to analyze the effects and consequences.

Discussion Questions

- What gendered concepts or theories, other than those mentioned in the video, have you encountered in psychology? What might be some of the real world consequences of this concept or theory?
- What concepts or theories have been influenced by attitudes or biases toward other kinds of identity categories (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, ability, etc.)? What might be some of the real world consequences of this concept or theory?
- Can you think of an example of a concept or theory in psychology that is not gendered? What might be some of the real world consequences of this concept or theory?
- How can we avoid gendering the concepts and theories in psychology moving forward? What are some of the challenges of developing gender sensitive or inclusive concepts and theories?
- Do you think the use of non-binary or gender neutral terms will help us develop concepts or theories that are more gender sensitive or gender neutral? Why or why not?

Activities

- Arrange students into groups of 3 or 4 and have them brainstorm what characteristics they associate with good concepts and theories in psychology. Reconvene as a class and consider whether these characteristics are more likely to be associated with gendered or gender neutral concepts and theories.
- Watch [Joan Chrisler's Psychology's Feminist Voices interview](#), up to the 2:40 mark, in which she describes the emergence of PMS as a concept and how it came to be used in the real world. As a class discuss the idea that PMS is a concept that only recently emerged. Can you think of other examples of psychological concepts or theories being used in real world settings?
- Divide the class in half and stage a class debate in which one side argues that all good theories and concepts in psychology must be gender sensitive or gender neutral and the other side argues against this idea. Encourage each side to provide evidence in favour of their assigned position, including examples of good or problematic concepts or theories that either are or are not gendered. After the debate hold a debriefing session in which the class discusses how persuasive they found the arguments on each side.

Assignments

- Have students select a concept or theory from psychology that they think is gendered (e.g., maternal instinct, bullying, attraction, etc.) and write a short (3-4 page) paper in which they: (1) define the concept or theory as it is currently understood in

psychology; (2) propose how the concept or theory might be reimaged in more gender sensitive ways; and (3) describe how a more gender sensitive or neutral version of this concept or theory might be beneficial to psychology as a science and to individuals in the real world.

- Ask students to find a critique of a theory or concept in psychology by people from more marginal social locations (in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, ability, etc.). Have each student do a short presentation in which they: (1) describe the original concept or theory that is being critiqued, (2) describe who is critiquing the concept or theory and summarize their critique, and (3) describe why they find the critique persuasive or not.

Additional Readings

Chrisler, J.C., & Caplan, P.J. (2002). The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde: How PMS became a cultural phenomenon and a psychiatric disorder. *Annual Review of Sex Research, 13*, 274-306.

Erikson, E. H. (1964). Inner and outer space: Reflections on womanhood. *Daedalus, 93*(2), 582-606.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Herculine Barbin*. (R. McDougall, Trans). New York: Pantheon

Nicholson, L. (1994). Interpreting gender. *Signs, 20*(1), 79-105.

Shields, S. A. (1984). To pet, coddle, and 'do for'": Caretaking and the concept of maternal instinct. In M. Lewis (Ed.), *The shadow of the past: Psychology portrays the sexes* (pp. 256-273). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Weisstein, N. (1971). Psychology constructs the female. *Journal of Social Education, 35*, 362-373.