

Differences Between Men and Women

(Kimmel, chapter 1; Barnett & Rivers)

Important terminology: Sex (biological maleness or femaleness) vs. gender (socially constructed masculinity or femininity; meanings that attach to sex within a culture)

Men and women are different. However, most of these differences have to do with inequality rather than biology.

“What I have come to call this ‘interplanetary’ theory of complete and universal *gender difference* is also typically the way we explain another universal phenomenon: *gender inequality*.” (Kimmel 1)

Kimmel raises two key questions: “Why is it that virtually every single society differentiates people on the basis of gender?” & “Why is it that virtually every known society is also based on male dominance?”

Kimmel argues that both “nature” and “nurture” explanations of gender difference & domination (1) view women and men as very different from each other and (2) believe that domination is an inevitable outcome of difference. He rejects both and argues that difference is the result of inequality.

Gendered institutions and social structures are the primary source of gender differences.

Individuals learn “hegemonic masculinity” and “emphasized femininity,” but negotiate our own paths. However, we do so within gendered institutions.

Kimmel and Barnett & Rivers argue that differences among men and women are larger than differences between them.

Barnett & Rivers argue that research that finds differences between men and women tends to get repeated in media and in the classroom because it confirms popular ideas about gender.

In particular, they debunk claims that women are more caring than men, that men don’t value personal relations, that gender differences in mate selection are pervasive and well established, that girls lose their self-esteem in early adolescence, and that boys are better at math than girls.

Many gender differences are really differences based on different social positions. We are “neighboring sexes,” not “opposite sexes.”