
Book Reviews

Sex Differences: Social and Biological Perspectives. *Edited and with an introduction by Michael S. Teitlebaum.* Garden City, New York, Anchor Books, 1976, 228 pp., \$2.95 (paper).

Sex Differences consists of five articles written for this collection by scholars of varying backgrounds who survey the literature in fields ranging from reproductive biology to sociology and the history of science. Demographer Michael Teitlebaum's stated aim in putting together these diverse viewpoints is to bridge the gap between the social and biological sciences in gender-related theory and research, in order to lower the "disciplinary blinders" with which most of us pose questions and seek to answer them. That the book cannot accomplish this ambitious goal is not entirely the fault of the editor or authors for, as Teitlebaum himself observes in his Introduction, the barriers which separate the social and biological approaches to this subject "are to a substantial degree *political* rather than intellectual." Moreover, it is unlikely that a book to which individual authors from widely disparate fields contribute solo chapters will forge a new interdisciplinary viewpoint, no matter how much exchange of information occurs before publication.

During the past few years the political debate to which Teitlebaum refers has heated up considerably, to the extent that any book jacket proclaiming a "social-biological perspective" runs the risk of being evaluated more on the basis of the authors' actual or suspected alliances with one or another faction on the sociobiological battlefield than for its contents. Happily, this volume does not lend itself easily to such pigeonholing, as the authors do not enter the ideological fracas in any direct way, but for the most part restrict themselves to rather straightforward reviews of the literature within their respective fields. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to represent this collection as a balance of two perspectives, for the weight quite clearly falls on the social side. Even the most biologically oriented chapter gives a good deal of attention to the ways in which social phenomena may build upon, channel, and possibly supersede genetically linked sex differences. There is a continual emphasis on the differences in treatment of boy and girl babies from birth, the dangers in extrapolating from non-human to human behavior, and the methodological problems which call into question the results of many studies which purport to establish biological origin for male-female differences in behavior. Evidence for sex differences in charac-

teristics and behavior from the prenatal stage to adulthood is, to be sure, presented and documented with appropriate references, but always within the context of the caveats listed above. It was almost a disappointment not to find the expected defense of the biological perspective with which an admittedly sociologically biased reviewer could take issue!

The care with which varying interpretations of research results are explored, the attention to pervasive methodological problems and other potential sources of bias, and the general skepticism in the face of contradictory evidence just referred to characterize most of the chapters. In other words, the authors set a fine example by standing back to scrutinize their own disciplines in a critical manner, while at the same time presenting each field's contributions to gender research. This is one of the book's real strengths.

Teitlebaum's introduction presents a brief but illuminating history of social-biological thought, from Malthus through Social Darwinism and the eugenics debate, concluding with a discussion of the "new" sociologists' response to theories of biological determinism in the late nineteenth century. He traces sociology's "generalized suspicion of those who argue that biological factors do have some impact upon human behavior" to that time, perhaps exaggerating the reluctance of modern-day biological and social scientists to give each other any credit for advancing the study of gender. His presentation of the wars between developing disciplines does, however, provide a perspective which is rare in readers intended for student use by emphasizing the political-cultural context from which various scientific approaches have emerged. The reader is invited to stand back for a moment from the voluminous mass of research results catalogued in succeeding chapters; and try to place it all in historical perspective.

The research review chapters are bracketed on the other end by an even lengthier discussion building on these same themes. Historian of science Elizabeth Fee gives a fascinating account of the intellectual history of the debate over woman's nature and proper place in Western industrial society between 1860 and 1920, linking the transformation in scientific attitudes which occurred during that period to developments in the economy and polity. She interprets what would appear to be unpredictable and aberrant swings of conviction in scientific thought — when seen from the perspective of a logical internal development of scientific theory — in the light of related developments outside the realm of "pure" science. Thus the volume closes as it opens, with an emphasis on the social and political context within which scientific work develops, and the suggestion that "the unexamined political and cultural assumptions that are hidden in any given theory account for the nature of the conclusions." This lesson applies, needless to say, to our own time as well as that of Spencer or Ward. While I disagree with the implicit idea that examining these unstated assumptions will, in and of itself, help build the needed bridges between biological and social approaches to research on human behavior, I believe that the

general perspectives of Fee and Teitlebaum are so seldom presented in texts that I would recommend the book for those sections alone.

The four chapters which make up the bulk of the book review the literature in the biology of sex differences, sex roles in primate societies, anthropological perspectives on sex roles and subsistence, and social influences on sex differences in behavior. While those who have taught or done research in sex roles will probably not find anything new in the chapters pertaining to their specialities, they are for the most part well organized and quite readable literature reviews, accompanied by extensive references. I found the chapter on primates particularly interesting for its documentation of the centrality of the matrifocal unit in many primate societies and the questions it raises about male versus female evolutionary strategies. The part of this chapter devoted to discussion of human society is much more sophisticated than the simplistic "Are people like baboons or are they not?" approach found in many similar writings. The chapter on subsistence picks up the theme of the importance of habitat in the mutual accommodations between women's food-producing and child-rearing activities, and raises (although it does not really explore) the larger question of women's status in society as related to their participation in a productive group beyond the domestic unit.

Just as the primate and subsistence chapters might be taken as a unit, those on biological and social influences are to some degree complementary. Each catalogues research findings on the similarities and differences between the sexes at various ages and stages, couched in warnings about the dangers of generalizing from aggregate results to predictions for individuals' behavior. The "Social Influences" chapter focuses on the impact of institutions such as family, peer groups, and in particular the educational system on sex-role learning. It calls readers' attention to the relative absence of data on sex-role development in later life and, indeed, gives very little attention to sex-role learning after childhood.

Bibliographies with each chapter are extensive, although here and there one finds surprising omissions (e.g., Rosenberg and Sutton-Smith's *Sex and Identity*, issued in 1972, which summarized various theoretical approaches and their associated research strategies, is nowhere mentioned). But one small collection cannot be expected to cover the complete range of work on sex differences, and the authors are generally successful in carrying out their intention to review the considerable literatures in selected segments of their own fields.

For whom will this book be useful? Certainly for undergraduates and graduate students just beginning their study of sex roles and in need of an introduction to the scope of the field. The book exhibits many of the virtues of a good text-reader: It provides numerous examples to illustrate points; relates research to theoretical approaches and, in a few places, to public policy questions;

makes some linkages between fields; is a good model of relatively jargon-free, literate academic writing. While *Sex Differences* may be less suitable as a primary course text than several other volumes now on the market, it would serve admirably as required supplementary reading. (It is of note for those concerned with role models that, the editor excepted, all of the contributing authors are female scholars.) More advanced students and those engaged in sex-role research will find the book a useful and compact literature review, with suggestive theoretical questions tucked among the data. Sociologists who (like me) managed to emerge from graduate school with relatively little consciousness of the intellectual history of our discipline, will find the first and last chapters of particular value.

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Sex Roles. Biological, Psychological and Social Foundations. *Shirley Weitz.*
New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, 283 pp., \$10.00 (cloth),
\$5.00 (paper).¹

Over the past decade, innumerable books on sex roles have emerged. Each has attempted in some degree to answer the question of the origin and maintenance of modern sex-role structure. Unfortunately, many of these books have fallen short in these attempts. In comparison, Weitz's concise book leaves the reader with a sense that she has struggled with the question and its related issues long and hard and that she has put together a provocative and quite diverse treatise. The book is full of interesting hypotheses, careful critical analysis, and integration of works ranging from historical accounts of nineteenth-century feminist thought to biologically based studies of hormonal influences on behavior.

To quote the author, "In writing my own book I have sought to make these three points the focus of concern: an interdisciplinary emphasis; an awareness that no one of these disciplines provides 'the' answer; and an approach acknowledging that female and male sex roles must be studied together as elements in a sex role system" (p. ix). One is impressed throughout the book with how well the author has met her stated objectives. She has brought a wealth of information from many disciplines to bear on the central theme of the book in a style that is both intellectually satisfying and aesthetically pleasing.

¹ This review was assigned under the tenure of the previous Book Review Editor, Joseph Pleck, and not the present Editor, Shirley Weitz, who is the author of the book under review.

In the first section Weitz discusses the biological maintenance systems, focusing on aggression (e.g., hormonal-brain-behavior systems and XYY males); sexuality (e.g., strength of sex drive and the link of male and female sexuality to broader personality styles); the menstrual cycle; maternal instinct and psychosexual abnormalities (e.g., adrenogenital syndrome, matched pairs of hermaphrodites and transsexualism). Throughout this chapter, Weitz notes the difficulty in separating biological and cultural influences and points out several instances in which this difficulty has either been overlooked or underplayed. Her discussions of the hormonal-brain-behavior system and the menstrual cycles are particularly good. Missing from this section are discussions of the correlational and experimental work on the link between testosterone and aggression and hostility in humans and higher primates, recent work on paternal behaviors in humans and higher primates, work on hormonal versus cultural interpretations of womens' other reproductive cycles such as the postpartum period and menopause, the implications of infanticide and child abuse for the concept of maternal instinct, and the implications of adrenogenital syndrome data for our understanding of sex differences in activity levels and aggression.

In the second section, Weitz discusses socialization and its effects on sex-typing, and sex differences in both cognitive abilities (e.g., spatial and verbal abilities and creativity) and socioemotional traits (e.g., activity, aggression, compliance, instrumentality, expressiveness, and social responsiveness). Under socialization, she evaluates the effects of parents both in terms of their roles as differential reinforcers, and as identification models. Psychoanalytic, social learning, and cognitive-developmental models are summarized and critiqued quite briefly. In addition to the influences of parents, Weitz summarizes – again quite briefly – the effects of school environment, peer groups, and symbolic agents. This section is one of the weaker sections of the book. The author does not provide sufficient critical analyses of either the theories or the empirical data presented. She has omitted the discussion of several key issues, namely, the work by Bell on reciprocal parent-child influences, the role of the fathers in socialization (e.g., work by Lamb and Block), the generalizability of laboratory results to the “real” world, the recent work in androgyny and sex-role transcendence, the limitations of the spatial skills literature, and the implications of brain lateralization for both spatial and verbal skills. In addition, in this section and the next, Weitz stresses the importance of the role of the family in the process of sex-role acquisition, but fails to provide support for this interpretative bias. The power of other socializing agents is unjustifiably underplayed.

In section 3, Weitz considers the role of the family in the maintenance of adult sex roles, focusing primarily on the career-family dichotomy. She discusses the origins and functions of marriage and the family (paying particular attention to the work of E. Shorter, *The Making of the American Family*, and of Engels), the division of labor both within the home and between domestic and occupational settings, and the role of the family in both male and female

career choice and development. As in the previous section, she plays down economic and political factors, playing up psychological factors instead. She also underestimates the role of the male in the family as a provider and underestimates the role of females in the economic systems across various cultures. In general this section would have benefited from a stronger cross-cultural perspective.

Sections 4 and 5 provide the most innovative insights and analysis into the issue of sex roles. Weitz's interdisciplinary goal is most clearly met in these sections.

In section 4, she considers the role of symbolism both as a reflector and as a mediator of the sex-role status quo. She discusses sexual pollution, the menstrual taboo, witchcraft, myth and ritual, language, literature, and the arts. Her analyses of witchcraft and myth and ritual are particularly interesting, while her analyses of literature and the media are more superficial.

In section 5, Weitz discusses sex-role change across time and space. She presents an evaluation of sex-role change in the U. S. S. R. and Eastern Europe, in China, in Israel, in Sweden, and finds the results rather disappointing in each case. These failures are attributed to the continuing low status of female jobs and to the lack of commitment to change in men's roles as well as in women's roles. She argues that major sex-role change will not occur until men are willing to join women in their domestic responsibilities. Section 5 ends with a very interesting historical account of feminist thought in America during this century.

In conclusion, while I found the book well written and extremely broad, I have three major criticisms. First, Weitz often accepts the stereotypic conceptualizations of male and female roles without critical examination. For example, she notes that boys get trucks and soldiers while girls get dolls, and that boys' toys are tied to active play while girls' toys lead to sedentary play. These are clear stereotypes. Girls also get jump ropes, bicycles, and swimming suits. Later she concludes that the "most important factor discouraging women from . . . scientific careers is the lack of motivation for any sort of sustained commitment to an occupational endeavor at all" (p. 102). This view has never been proven and is very condescending. It suggests that the things many women dedicate their lives to are trivial and not true achievements and defines occupation and achievement strictly terms of the male models. I found this bias very disturbing. Second, generally insufficient documentation is provided for many conclusions. Both sources and discussions of available evidence are needed throughout the book. Third, Weitz tends to overgeneralize her conclusions and to oversimplify issues at several points. For example, in her discussion of Shorter's work, she appears to agree with his conclusion that children died from neglect in Europe during the eighteenth century. The issues surrounding parent-child attachment are quite complex, and comparative data from other cultures with high infant mortality would certainly have broadened the discussion of this issue and its role in the origin of the modern family.

Despite these problems, Weitz's book provides us with a broad interdisciplinary analysis of sex roles. It tackles a complex problem and forces the reader to consider a myriad of points of view in a very small space.

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The Behavior of Women and Men. *Kay Deaux.* Monterey, California, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1976, 168 pp., \$4.95 (paper).

Kay Deaux occupies a very special place in the psychology of women. As a "mainstream" social psychologist, she has brought existing social psychological theories to bear on a number of important questions related to the perception and treatment of women and men. With her colleagues, she has conducted within an overall attribution analysis a series of ingenious empirical investigations into the ways in which men and women are evaluated differently for the same behavior. In general, she has worked to bridge the gap between theory-based and problem-based academic research, and she has done this in a manner which is sophisticated, intelligent, and intelligible.

In *The Behavior of Women and Men* Deaux has attempted an ambitious project: to summarize existing findings about the behavior of women and men in social situations. In her general introduction to the topic, Deaux briefly places the social psychological perspective in relation to biological, socialization, and cross-cultural perspectives. Central to the social psychological approach is the dual focus on the person and the situation, an approach which has two important implications. First, since the sex of others is often a key feature of the situation, the book is not simply concerned with the behavior *of* women and men but also extends to behavior *toward* women and men. Second, Deaux emphasizes that although no sex differences may be apparent in a simple cataloguing of aggregate data, subtle differences may be located in motivation, the quality of the response, or in the situational conditions for the behavior. Both of these points are of continuing importance in placing some of the research findings within a coherent framework.

The book includes chapters on personality stereotypes, performance evaluation, self-evaluation, achievement and fear of success, communication styles, altruism, aggression, strategies of interaction (compliance, cooperation, competition, and congeniality), group behavior, interpersonal attraction, and androgyny. Within each chapter, Deaux has selected a number of illustrative studies and describes them in enough detail to make them understandable to beginning students. Despite the basic empirical approach, the style is never

dry – in fact it is often quite delightful and is punctuated with personal anecdotes.

One of the strong points of the book is that any student reading it will learn a great deal about the posing of empirical questions and research design in general. Thus, the book is a useful teaching tool for a variety of courses. Since it is an example of empirical approaches to sex differences and similarities in social behavior, the book would be useful in a psychology of women course as a supplement to more theoretical and broader approaches. It might be more useful, however, as a supplement to an introductory social psychology course, where it might convince some budding “mainstream” psychologists of the importance of this topic and thus facilitate future research in this area.

Because of Deaux’s own work in cognitive social psychology, the chapter on performance evaluation is predictably strong, along with those on stereotypes, self-evaluation, and achievement motivation. In these chapters she makes a number of interesting distinctions and consistently tries to link cognitive activity to behavioral outcomes. In particular, her discussion of fear of success – the motive, the measurement, and the relation to achievement behavior – is an excellent explication of the issues and assumptions involved in this line of research. The argument proceeds in a lucid and logical manner to the conclusion that people (both women and men) behave rationally, avoiding either success or failure when the consequences promise to be unpleasant. Although all the chapters are short (about 10 pages each), they provide a sound introduction to their topics. Deaux stays quite close to her data, but she has selected these data carefully to shed light on some key questions.

Although this overall approach works well for many topics, some chapters suffer from too narrow a focus. For example, the chapter on communication styles lacks the coherence that a more theoretical approach, such as Nancy Henley’s power analysis, offers. Similarly, the aggression chapter flounders because of a basic conceptual weakness, namely, the failure to define aggression. The data cited are limited to those derived from laboratory shock experiments and field studies of horn honking, bumping people with shopping carts, and cutting into lines. The main conclusions offered are two: men are more likely to initiate aggression, but women are as likely to respond to provoking situations; and men are more often the targets of aggression. Sweeping generalizations such as these are unsatisfying in part because of the limited data base. A more fundamental flaw, however, is that even within these limited situations, distinctions concerning the quality of aggressive acts become blurred. Deaux cites uncritically a study which codes both “glares” and “physical shoves,” two seemingly very different behaviors, as “nonverbal aggression.” Subsequently, she makes an unfortunate positive reference to the “spouse abuse” work, which has been criticized precisely for failing to distinguish between the quality of aggressive acts. Given her initial comments about seeking subtle differences within aggregate data, one would think she would be among the first to notice that

conclusions such as “aggressive acts occur equally frequently for the two partners” mask some very real differences in the quality of aggression between husbands and wives.

Deaux begins with the paradigms of cognitive social psychology, and the weaknesses of the book are mainly a reflection of their limitations. These limitations may well frustrate some readers, particularly in women’s studies, but may also encourage creative debate and analysis. Social psychology at its best can play a critical role in bridging individualistic psychological perspectives and broader social systems approaches. The intersecting of problem-based questions, which are likely to be raised by feminist researchers, and theory-based answers, which are likely to be offered by social psychologists, can both refine the understanding of the problem and expand the conceptualization of the theory. One potential benefit of the book is in highlighting the inadequacies of the current practice of social psychology for understanding some very fundamental human issues. Deaux has done a valuable service in providing a basic organization of this social psychological perspective upon which subsequent research and theory building can expand.

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