

Gender Difference: Myth or Reality

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Article Info.

E-ISSN: 2583-6528
Impact Factor (SJIF): 6.876
Peer Reviewed Journal
Available online:
www.alladvancejournal.com

Received: 28/June/2025
Accepted: 28/July/2025

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Abstract

Concepts are developed by social scientist as terms to study the nature of society and social behaviour, through which social scientist develop various analytical theories and categories that act as an assistance in the investigation of behaviour in the society. Gender is also a kind of concept developed to provide a framework in the systematic study of understanding men and women and their nature. Concept of gender is related with concepts of sex, masculinity, feminism, patriarchy etc. This concept is also associated with various issues like superiority of men over women, reliability of gender as a predictor of performance and ability and other individual outcomes. There are many researches of the view that both men and women differ biologically to a great extent for sure, but assuming such difference between the groups simply on the basis of their sex is not justified. It leads to an age-old stereotype and need to be rectified. In the present paper an attempt has made to compare the ability, performance and achievement of both the genders (male and female) in various steps of life and also critically review the myths about gender and sex related predictions and about their behaviours. Data and statistics from various sources regarding behavioural patterns, performance and achievement were collected, compared and concluded. Whereas, the results obtained do not approve the point that women are poor than the men generally. This paper mainly highlights the points that are satisfactorily useful to prove that gender discrimination or negative biases need to be changed.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Discrimination, Gender Biases, Negative Biases, Inclusive Society, Inclusion etc.

Introduction

In a developing country like India where it is very unfortunate that 50% of our population i.e., women are not equally treated even today which leads to a great loss of our human resources. It is because of an age-old claim that men and women differ in their ability, understanding, skills, knowledge etc. is it true? Here, I am sure; we have an ambiguity in our response. There is a group of people who advocate the difference among men and women and support it. On the other hand, other group of people disapproves the sex difference and comments that assumption based upon sex are simply myths, stereotypes or discrimination against not only women but both men and women. On scientific and empirical grounds these assumptions are difficult to justify or proved. Apart from this, there is another stream of thinkers who believe that there may be some differences between men and women but such cannot be attributed solely to sex differences

blindly. There are many factors that can be responsible for it. For example, it may be the environment, social support, exposure and many more.

What is Gender?

Generally, gender is referred to the state of being male and female. But being male and female is a biological and physiological characteristic, which is known as "sex". Sex is biologically assigned to an individual. Sex is binary and permanent also. Gender is what a person identifies himself or herself. Gender is not binary; it is a spectrum. Male and female can be considered sex whereas gender is masculine and feminine. So, we can say gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. At the same time gender is not permanent. Gender construction varies from one society to another. Thus, gender is the range

of characteristics pertaining to masculine and feminine and differentiating between masculinity and femininity. These characteristics may include biological sex, sex based social structures and gender identity. According to WHO (World Health Organization) (2014) gender is “Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles and relationships between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours, including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places.”

What is Gender Difference?

Gender differences refer to social differences or social constructionism which suggests that it comes primarily from the expectations of society. It is believed that men and women mainly learn how to act based on the expectations of authority figures, peers and media. Gender can be changed or reconstructed as the norms of society change. As a result of age long closed thinking there are some gender roles that are assigned to men and women to be only performed by them. These roles are also regarded as tradition and cultural customs and have a deep control on the psychological aspect of a person whether men or women.

Gender Roles

Gender roles can be defined as the different standards of behaviour that society expects depending on whether a person is biologically male or female. It encompasses the expectations on how a person should behave, dress and interact. For a long time in history we see, it is common for women to stay at home and lead the household. They were not expected to have careers of their own and instead focused on providing a homestead for the family and children where as men were considered the head of the family and primary bread earner. Men were also expected to be less emotional and more focused on their careers. But presently there has been a shift from those expectations and the gender roles lie somewhere in the middle.

Review of Related Literatures

Some researchers have their view that the biological differences between men and women are also results in their mental and physical differences. They suggest that biologically, men are physically and mentally superior to women. Other researchers suggest that the biological differences among men and women can be exaggerated. The differences are socially constructed by the patriarchal system of the society and women become subordinate to men. Following are the literature related to the current topic give below.

Fiengold (1994) addressed that there has been a popular claim that boys and girls differ widely, not only in their biological make-up but in their abilities, skills, knowledge, understanding, and output and also in the organizational performance and managerial competence in their lives.

Halper (2000); Voyer *et al.* (1995) in their study analysed that we should not believe that the two groups think differently, learn differently and need to be treated differently as the statistical data supporting the above view are not available.

Ann Oakley (1972) in her book ‘Sex, gender and society’ explores the term gender. She says that in the western culture women play the roles of the ‘housewife’ and ‘mother’. This is because women are made to play these roles because of their

biology. The western culture also believes that any effort to change the traditional roles of men and women in the society can cause damage to the social fabric of the society. She further concluded that this view regarding the roles of men and women helps to support and maintain the patriarchal society.

Simone de Beauvoir (1986) in her book ‘The Second Sex’ says that “one is not born, but rather become a woman”. She explains that gender differences in the society make the man superior through his role as the bread earner. It gives him a position of power in the society and family. Gender differences are set in hierachal opposition such that men are superior and women are subordinate. Women’s position is that of the ‘other’ and women are the continual outsiders. Civilization was masculine to its very depth.

Shulamith Firestone (1970) in her book, ‘The Dialectics of Sex’ suggests that patriarchy exploits women’s biological capacity to reproduce as their essential weakness. She explains that the only way for women to break away from this oppression is to use technological advances to free themselves from the burden of childbirth.

Gender Related Myths

There is a huge list of myths about men and women. Most common among them are mentioned in the table below.

Myths about men and women	
Women	Men
Women are emotive, beautiful, vain and fertile.	Men are by nature aggressive and belligerent but protectors.
Women seek protection, security, to be social and care taking.	Men seek sex, competition and status.
Women are not enough decision makers.	Men are main decision makers.
Women lack resources of innovation.	Men are more exhibits in expression of innovation.
Women are fewer careers oriented.	Men are careers oriented.
Women are intuitive.	Men are less intuitive.
Women are risk- adverse.	Men are risk- takers.

Points of study

There are a huge number of myths about men and women. However, researches in modern time have tried to check the validity of some prominent myths about gender difference. The present paper takes an attempt to investigate the myths related with gender difference and biases, on the basis of following points of study mentioned below.

- Cognitive ability and Gender
- Competitiveness and Gender
- Emotional ability and Gender
- Talkativeness and Gender
- Intuitiveness and Gender
- Academic achievement and Gender
- Role in administrative/organizational work and Gender

Thus, in the present paper, the researcher attempts to examine the view of gender and gender difference its realities and myths based on following critical points.

- Whether two groups really differ?
- Whether both are doing equally well in different sphere of life?
- Whether any one among the group is superior or not?

Discussion

1. Cognitive ability and Gender

On the basis of cognitive ability, there is a perspective that girls are inferior at math centric career like engineering, technology and computers etc. though it is not an actual biological handicap. A study conducted by Spencer *et al.*, 1999 in Texas university in two condition i.e. action prepared against women and action prepared neutral towards women. The study shows the result that action prepared against women scored poor and action prepared neutral towards women scored considerably better. A visible result appear that men are better in cognitive ability, is certainly myth.

2. Competitiveness and Gender

It is quite often assumed that men are competitive and women are collaborative. There are many western studies that confirm this bias. But a study done in Columbia University and Chicago University showed that there are no difference i.e. shown in the table given below.

S No.	Name of Tribe	Country	Family	Result
1.	Masai	Tanzania	Patriarchal	Men are more competitive.
2.	Hhasi	India	Matrilineal	Women are more competitive.

From the above table it can be interpret that there is no biological basis for competitiveness. The findings of the study as evident that differences between the sexes are merely social biases which reflects the fact that young girls and boys are reared and socialized differently. Therefore, if the difference in socialization process can be controlled then the difference in competitiveness will disappear.

3. Emotional ability and Gender

Theories of Emotional development state that 'emotions are universal'. Many studies have also shown that there is no difference in the experience and expression of emotion between men and women. But since women are already perceived to be more emotional as a result, they consistently score higher than men on various emotional intelligence tests. Many studies on emotional expression reveal that both men and women are likely to exhibit sympathy, affection and emotion equally irrespective to their gender and behave accordingly as circumstances. Janet Shibley Hyde (2005) whose article "The gender similarities hypothesis" was published and has opined that there are very few areas where men and women are substantially different. They differ in measures of motor performance works such as tasks with speed and throwing power. It is just because, since puberty men are bigger and have more muscle mass. As a result, men exhibit more physical aggression than women while women score higher on tests of relational aggression and verbal bullying.

4. Talkativeness and Gender

A popular belief about the women is that they can speak tens of thousands of words per day, where men manage to utter only a few hundred words. Women are regarded as the great communicators of the society. But there is virtually no difference between the number of words spoken by men or women. A study conducted in University of Arizona (2007) where 396 college students (both male and female) are monitored and found that both the male and female spoke an average of about 16000 words per day, irrespective to their gender. In another study conducted by Seizer & Smith (2001)

and interpreted their findings as evidence the men were found to use much more words per day as compared to their counterparts.

5. Intuitiveness and Gender

Intuition is an ability to understand something instinctively without the need for conscious reasoning. Traditionally intuition is considered a female attribute. Many women pride themselves on their power of intuition. But modern studies reveal that intuitive empathic thinking is not a sole province of females. In one study conducted by Eton & Inns (1986) where men and women were asked to differentiate real smiles from fake ones. In the findings no difference was obtained.

S. No.	Group	Detection
1.	Men	72%
2.	Women	71%

6. Academic Achievement and Gender

If we compare the groups of boys and girls from the point of view of academic achievement then the results will go in favour of girls. As far as the last decade passing percentage and comparative performance of girls have been higher than those of boys. These do not approve the difference based on gender between the two groups. There is a history of huge drop outs and low academic achievement of girls for many years. It is statistically proven that the girls too can perform equal to boys or in some cases higher than them, provided they too get equal opportunities of exposure and resources.

7. Role in Administrative/Organizational work and Gender

The presence and participation of females in different types of administrative and organizational settings are also attacked by gender stereotype. About four decades ago the share of women in job sector was extremely negligible. We hardly found women in various government and private jobs. But now the whole scenario has changed. As women are doing excellent in academics, they are also dominating the corporate and administration areas. It all depends upon the opportunities that women are receiving in present time. They have crossed the line of prohibitions and restrictions and contributing to the development of society.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can say that some women may talk more than their husbands and some men are more competitive than their wives, but those differences are created by society, not biology (Barnet & Rivers, 2001). If you compare men and women on some particular point, you may attest that they are contra to each other which may depends on their interest, attitude likes and dislikes. Both men and women are far more alike than being different. The discussions on various critical points and findings and views quoted in the present paper in the context of gender difference suggest that reinforcing gender biases and stereotypes about men and women solidifies age long outdated gender role and also damaging the nature and activities of both of them and prevent them from expressing their true personality. Here we can conclude that both men and women are similar and if given equal opportunities of development, it will not only enhance the status of both men and women but also help in the development and utilization of human resources.

"The soul has no gender."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes

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