CHAPTER 8
Language, Communication, and Emotion

Key Concepts

How Does Gender-Related Language Influence Social Perception?
  Gendered Features of Language
    The Generic Masculine
    Grammatical Gender
    Diminutives and Gender Labels
  The Influence of Gendered Language on Perceptions

What Roles Do Sex and Gender Play in Verbal Communication?
  Sex Differences in How People Communicate
    Who Talks More?
    Who Interrupts More?
  Sex Differences in What People Communicate
    Gossip
    Social Media
  Beyond Sex Differences: Intersectionality in Communication
    Verbal Communication: What's the Big Picture?

What Roles Do Sex and Gender Play in Nonverbal Communication?
  Smiling and Eye Contact
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  Nonverbal Communication: What's the Big Picture?

How Do Sex and Gender Shape the Experience, Expression, and Identification of Emotions?
  Emotional Experience and Expression
    Debate: Are Women More Emotional Than Men?
  Display Rules
  Encoding and Decoding Accuracy
  Empathy and Emotional Intelligence
  Journey of Research: Understanding Empathy, From Darwin to Mirror Neurons

Learning Objectives

Students who read this chapter should be able to do the following:

8.1 Describe how gender-related words and language shape perceptions.

8.2 Analyze sex similarities and differences in verbal and nonverbal communication.

8.3 Evaluate how status, power, and culture shape sex differences in communication.

8.4 Analyze how sex and gender shape the experience and expression of emotion.
Language, Communication, and Emotion

In 2002, Moshe Koppel and his colleagues created a computer program that allowed them to test whether men and women use language differently. They fed the program samples of text, both fiction and nonfiction, from 566 authors. By analyzing the writings of men and women, the computer taught itself to recognize sex differences in word usage and sentence structure, and it correctly identified the author's sex 80% of the time (Koppel, Argamon, & Shimoni, 2002). This suggests that male and female authors use language differently, but how? What cues did Koppel's program rely on to determine writers' sex? It turns out that sex differences in written communication are not obvious and tend to be more about grammar than content. For example, female writers use communal prepositions (e.g., with) and write in the present tense more than male writers, who more frequently use words that quantify nouns (e.g., two and more).

So computers can recognize a person's sex fairly accurately just by reading text, but what about humans? People certainly think that they can tell the difference between the writing of men and women. Nobel Prize–winning author V. S. Naipaul once claimed that female authors write in a “sentimental” style that he could easily identify within a few paragraphs (Fallon, 2011). But what does the research show? Anthony Mulac and his colleagues have studied this topic for decades, and their findings reveal that humans fall short of computers when it comes to detecting sex differences in communication. For example, people cannot accurately guess sex based on verbal or written descriptions of landscape photos, nor can they identify the sex of fourth, eighth, or 12th graders based on their written essays (Mulac, 2006). Research by Kristine Nowak corroborates these findings. Nowak (2003) had participants engage in an online, text-based interaction with a “partner” to discuss a neutral topic. Unbeknownst to participants, their partners' responses were written in advance by male and female research assistants. Nowak found that participants were no better than chance at guessing whether their “partner” was male or female. Taken together, these studies suggest that spoken and written language does not differ by sex in ways that humans can detect readily. In fact, despite V. S. Naipaul's claims regarding women's easily identifiable, “sentimental” writing style, women writers have sometimes used pseudonyms to pass successfully as men. The English novelist George Eliot, for instance, was actually Mary Ann Evans, and American science fiction writer James Tiptree Jr. was really Alice B. Sheldon.

This chapter addresses gender and communication in a broad sense, focusing on words and language, verbal and nonverbal communication, and emotional expression. Given how accurately the computer program designed by Koppel and his colleagues (2002) distinguished between the writing of male and female authors, there may in fact
be gender “fingerprints” in communication. But sex differences in communication do not always map onto common gender stereotypes, as we will discuss in this chapter. Before considering sex differences in communication, we will examine whether language itself reflects and perpetuates gender biases.

How Does Gender-Related Language Influence Social Perception?

Cultural debates often arise around word choice. Sometimes cultural attitudes change faster than language, which can create a period of ambiguity about acceptable word usage. Is it preferable to say Mrs. or Ms.? Homosexual or gay? Sex change surgery or genital reconstruction surgery? Using nonpreferred terminology can lead to awkward interactions if certain terms carry offensive or outdated meanings. For example, while the word homosexual may seem acceptable to some, many gay people find it alienating due to its association with an era during which people pathologized same-sex sexuality (Gingold, Hancock, & Cerbone, 2006).

These kinds of debates about language may strike some as unnecessary political correctness, or overblown pressure to avoid offending members of socially disadvantaged groups. Others, however, propose that word choice is important because words have the power to shape social perceptions and attitudes. According to linguist Benjamin Whorf (1956), the structure of language determines the nature of thought. The Whorfian hypothesis (or linguistic relativity hypothesis) proposes that a person who uses one set of words or speaks one language may actually see the world differently than a person who uses a different set of words or speaks a different language. In the sections to follow, we discuss the ways in which words and language can influence people’s ideas about sex and gender.

Stop and Think

People frequently use the term the opposite sex to refer to the sex binary. How might this term influence how people think about sex differences and similarities? Are women and men “opposite” to one another? What other terms might be used in place of the opposite sex that would convey similar meaning?

Gendered Features of Language

The generic masculine. The generic masculine refers to the tradition of using male-gendered terms to refer to mixed-sex groups, sex-unspecified groups, or people in general. Examples include using words such as mankind, chairman, forefathers, brotherhood, and manpower to refer to both men and women and using male pronouns to refer to mixed-sex groups (e.g., a teacher announcing, “Each student should
The use of male-gendered terms to refer not only to men but to mixed-sex groups, to human beings in general, or to individuals whose sex is unknown or unspecified.

Generic masculine: The use of male-gendered terms to refer not only to men but to mixed-sex groups, to human beings in general, or to individuals whose sex is unknown or unspecified.

sharpen his pencil before the exam”). Consider another example: using the phrase “Hey, guys!” to refer to a mixed-sex group or even a group of all women. While this might not strike you as odd, think about how it differs from saying, “Hey, gals!” to a group of all men.

The generic masculine is imprecise and can obscure meaning. Consider this statement: “Most congressmen oppose the Equal Rights Amendment.” Does this mean that most members of Congress oppose the Equal Rights Amendment or just that most male members of Congress oppose it? The use of the generic masculine makes it hard to know. The generic masculine also tends to render girls and women invisible. Consistent with the Whorfian hypothesis, several experiments demonstrate that generic masculine language (versus gender-inclusive language) produces gender-biased thoughts in adults and children (Hyde, 1984; Vainapel, Shamir, Tenenbaum, & Gilam, 2015). In one experiment, women who took part in mock job interviews heard either generic masculine (he), gender-inclusive (he or she), or gender-neutral (one) language from the interviewer. For instance, the interviewer said, “We usually know a good employee when we see him” versus “... when we see him or her” or “... when we see one.” Women in the generic masculine condition reported a lower expected sense of belonging, lower motivation, and less identification with the job than those exposed to inclusive language (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). In contrast, as shown in Figure 8.1, men’s expected sense of belonging in the job was unaffected by the language that the interviewer used.

Figure 8.1 Gendered Language and Sense of Belonging in a Job.

In comparison with men, women expect to feel less belonging in a job when an interviewer uses gender-exclusive language (referring only to he and him). When the interviewer uses gender-inclusive or gender-neutral language, women and men expect to feel the same degree of belonging in a job.

Source: Stout and Dasgupta (2011).
Norms are changing and generic masculine language has been increasingly replaced by more gender-neutral language in English-language academic texts and popular discourse over the past few decades (Earp, 2012). Moreover, the American Psychological Association (2010) now recommends using gender-inclusive language in its *Publication Manual*, an influential writing style resource not just for psychologists but for authors in other fields, such as nursing, sociology, and education. Table 8.1 offers several examples of gender-inclusive language that can be used in place of the generic masculine.

What about nonbinary individuals who identify as neither male nor female? What language options are inclusive of nonbinary people? Some use *they* as a singular, for instance, saying, “They are running late,” to refer to the fact that Ana is running late. Others, however, have difficulty adjusting grammatically to the use of plural pronouns to describe singular targets. As gender-neutral language becomes more common, new gender-neutral pronouns emerge (e.g., using *ze/zir* instead of *she/her* and *he/him*). In 2012, Sweden introduced the gender-neutral pronoun *hen* to be used in place of *hon* (she) and *han* (he) when an individual is transgender or when sex is unknown or irrelevant. One study showed that from 2012 to 2015, everyday usage of the word *hen* increased in Sweden, and attitudes toward this pronoun shifted from negative to positive (Sendén, Bäck, & Lindqvist, 2015).

Table 8.1 Gender-Exclusive and Gender-Inclusive Language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Exclusive</th>
<th>Gender Inclusive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mailman, policeman, chairman</td>
<td>Mail carrier, police officer, chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankind, brotherhood</td>
<td>Humanity, friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, his, him, you guys (to refer to mixed-sex groups)</td>
<td>He or she, hers or his, her or him, you all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Sidebar 8.1: Does the Term *Men* Mean Men and Women?

Consider two books that shaped British intellectual thought: Thomas Paine’s (1791/1999) *Rights of Man* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s (1792) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The latter is clearly about women, but the former is presumably about humankind more generally. (Or is it?) In a related vein, consider the Dictionary Act, which the U.S. Congress passed in 1871 to make the generic masculine refer to both men and women in all federal laws. When late-19th-century suffragists argued that laws phrased in the generic masculine giving *men* the right to vote also gave women the right to vote, their appeals were denied (Baron, 2016). These examples illustrate that the generic masculine tends to be ambiguous and selectively applied.

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Table 8.1 Gender-Exclusive and Gender-Inclusive Language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diminutive, Trivializing Language</th>
<th>Gender Neutral, Higher-Status Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actress, authoress, stewardess</td>
<td>Actor, author, flight attendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls (to refer to adult women)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grammatical gender. Some languages, such as Arabic, Hindi, Russian, Spanish, and French have grammatical gender, which means that nouns are classified as masculine, feminine, and sometimes neutral. Other languages, such as English, Finnish, Turkish, Korean, and Maori do not have grammatical gender. For example, table and bread do not have genders in English, but table is feminine in Spanish (la mesa) and French (la table), whereas bread is masculine in Spanish and French (el pan, le pain). What might be some consequences of speaking a language that uses gendered nouns? Does this relate to gender role attitudes at the cultural level? Some findings point to this possibility. Nations that have gendered languages have lower levels of gender equality compared with nations that speak genderless languages (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012). This may be because referring to objects as masculine or feminine enhances gender distinctions within a culture (Boroditsky, Schmidt, & Phillips, 2003). Of course, we cannot draw a causal conclusion from this correlation because perhaps the gender equality of cultures drives gendered language customs (rather than the other way around). However, some experimental research supports the idea that gendered language can increase sexist beliefs. When bilingual students were randomly assigned to complete a survey on sexist attitudes in Spanish or French (gendered languages), they reported more sexist attitudes than when they completed the same survey in English, a relatively nongendered language (Wasserman & Weseley, 2009). This finding is consistent with the Whorfian hypothesis (discussed earlier in the chapter) that language can affect the way people think.

Diminutives and gender labels. Adding gendered suffixes or labels to neutral words also introduces gender into language. Nouns become feminized with gendered suffixes, such as when hero becomes heroine, actor becomes actress, and host becomes hostess. Sometimes people add unnecessary qualifiers to a role, such as female scientist or male nurse. These suffixes and qualifiers imply and spotlight gender role norm violations. Gender suffixes and qualifiers can also suggest subtle power differences, for example, by implying that a female scientist differs somehow from a “regular scientist” (Crawford, 2001). Gender labels can also be used as diminutives. A common example of this occurs in the United States when people refer to adult women as girls. Technically speaking, since a girl is a female child, calling grown women girls can be a way of reducing their social status and infantilizing them.

Several decades ago in the United States, people commonly referred to married women using only their husbands’ name (e.g., this would be like calling Beyoncé “Mrs. Shawn Carter”). This type of labeling stems from the 17th-century principle of coverture,
which was a common law that transferred a woman’s legal rights and property to her husband upon marriage (Cullen-DuPont, 2000). In essence, coverture erased a woman’s identity and subsumed it under that of her husband. Of course, much has changed since coverture was abolished in the late 19th century. In fact, women in the United States have become increasingly likely since the 1980s to keep their own last names upon marriage (C. C. Miller & Willis, 2015).

The Influence of Gendered Language on Perceptions

How does gendered language affect perceptions? We have already discussed how people report more sexist attitudes in gendered versus nongendered languages. As another example, language can reinforce gender stereotypes. In an analysis of adjectives from a repository of millions of words from English-language fiction and nonfiction texts published between 1990 and 2012, linguist Nic Subtirelu found that authors used the trait pushy far more often to describe women than men and the trait condescending far more often to describe men than women (Khazan, 2014). Think about the different meanings of these words. To condescend is to look down on someone; thus, calling men condescending implies that they are in a position of relative power. In contrast, calling women pushy implies that they attempt to assert more power than they legitimately have. In this sense, word use reinforces stereotypes about sex differences in power.

Additional evidence for the Whorfian hypothesis is found in the language that people use to describe sexual and domestic violence. Henley, Miller, and Beazley (1995) analyzed the content of over 1,500 newspaper articles and found that the verbs raped and murdered were more likely to be stated in the passive voice (e.g., “X was raped”) in comparison with other verbs, such as thanked and robbed, which were more likely to be stated in the active voice (e.g., “X robbed Y”). Furthermore, people use passive voice more frequently to describe instances of domestic violence with male, rather than female, perpetrators (Frazer & Miller, 2008). For example, written descriptions of male-to-female partner violence more frequently include wordings such as “She was beaten,” while descriptions of female-to-male partner violence more frequently include wordings such as “She beat him.” These wordings directly affect how people attribute harm and blame to victims and perpetrators. When people read passive-voice (versus active-voice) accounts of rape, they perceive less harm to victims, more responsibility to victims, and less responsibility to perpetrators (Bohner, 2001; Henley et al., 1995). Likely without realizing it, crime reporters may describe rape and domestic violence in ways that heighten the blame associated with female victims and reduce the blame associated with male perpetrators.

People sometimes intentionally invent words to give legitimacy to experiences or to raise awareness about social issues. As Gloria Steinem (1983) famously quipped, “We have terms like sexual harassment and battered women. A few years ago, they were just called life” (p. 149). Giving names to experiences like sexual harassment and marital rape can bring attention to unacknowledged problems and thereby initiate change (C. A. Smith, Johnston-Robledo, McHugh, & Chrisler, 2010). People also sometimes transform the meaning of words, which happens when members of
a stigmatized group reclaim a derogatory label and use it in an empowering way. For example, when critics called Hillary Clinton a “bitch,” Saturday Night Live cast member Tina Fey responded by saying, “So am I. Know what? Bitches get stuff done” (Clark-Flory, 2008). Similarly, LGBT individuals reappropriate terms like queer, queen, dyke, and fag as positive self-labels. Experimental evidence shows that when members of stigmatized groups label themselves with derogatory words, they feel more powerful, and observers perceive them and their group as more powerful, too (A. D. Galinsky et al., 2013). Thus, adopting derogatory self-labels can empower people and lessen stigma.

What Roles Do Sex and Gender Play in Verbal Communication?

In the chapter opener, we addressed a topic widely debated among researchers: whether women and men communicate differently. On one side, sometimes called the different cultures approach, researchers view difference as the rule and male–female miscommunication as inevitable. Proponents of this approach suggest that boys and girls are socialized within different “cultures” and accordingly develop different and nonoverlapping communication styles (Maltz & Borker, 1982; J. T. Wood, 2015). Specifically, girls and women develop an affective communication style that is emotionally expressive and oriented toward maintaining relationships, whereas boys and men develop an instrumental communication style that is informational and oriented toward problem solving and completing tasks. On the other side, researchers view similarity as the rule and find sparse evidence of substantive differences in male and female communication patterns (Crawford, 2001; Dindia, 2006). So which perspective is accurate? In this section and the next one (“What Role Do Sex and Gender Play in Nonverbal Communication?”), we examine this question.

Sidebar 8.2: Mars and Venus?

Even though the evidence generally shows small sex differences in emotional and assertive language, some authors profit greatly from portraying sex differences in communication styles as large. This might remind you of our discussion of minimalist versus maximalist approaches to interpreting sex differences in Chapter 2 ("Studying Sex and Gender"). John Gray, a maximalist who espouses the different cultures thesis, wrote a series of pop psychology books about gender, including Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus (1992). Gray argues that women and men are so different that they could come from different planets (not simply different cultures), which leads to miscommunication and relationship problems. Though Gray's work has wide popular appeal, his ideas about male–female differences are not grounded in scientific research.
Sex Differences in How People Communicate

The study of oral communication can be approached from different angles. You can examine how people communicate (e.g., how much or how fast they talk, how many hesitations they use). You can also examine the contents of communication, such as the topics people discuss and the types of words they typically use. We will first examine how women and men communicate before moving to the contents of gendered communication.

Who talks more? Proverbs from both Western and Eastern cultures reflect a common stereotype of women as talkative:

“Women’s tongues are like lambs’ tails—they are never still.”
—Old English proverb

“Where there are women and geese, there is noise.”
—Japanese proverb

This stereotype implies not only that women are talkative but that the contents of their speech are unimportant, comparable to the “noise” made by geese. Conversely, a well-known male stereotype is of the “strong, silent type.” Picture the gunslinger in any number of westerns, such as Clint Eastwood as Blondie in The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly or Denzel Washington as Sam Chisolm in The Magnificent Seven. Men like these seem to derive power from their lack of frivolous conversation. But does research support the stereotype that women talk more than men? To find out, Shannon Holleran and her collaborators recorded people’s spontaneous conversations in their daily lives using small digital voice recorders (Holleran, Mehl, & Levitt, 2009). When they compared the word use of women and men, they found no significant sex difference: Both women and men spoke about 16,000 words per day, on average. However, there were huge individual differences. One person spoke an estimated 795 words a day while another spoke 47,000 words. Both were men.
The findings of Holleran and her colleagues (2009) align with meta-analyses showing that sex differences in talkativeness are often small and depend on contextual factors. For example, Leaper and Ayres (2007) found that men, on average, were slightly more talkative than women ($d = 0.14$). Another meta-analysis of children showed that girls, on average, were slightly more talkative than boys ($d = -0.11$), but this difference only held for very young children between the ages of 1 and 2.5 (Leaper & Smith, 2004). Recall from Chapter 7 (“Cognitive Abilities and Aptitudes”) that girls tend to talk earlier than boys, which could account for this sex difference in very young children. When it comes to parental communication, mothers, on average, talk more to their children than fathers do ($d = -0.26$; Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998). Women also tend to be more talkative in small, collaborative groups but not in noncollaborative settings (Onnela, Waber, Pentland, Schnorf, & Lazer, 2014). Finally, men tend to talk more than women in formal task-oriented, mixed-sex groups (D. James & Drakich, 1993).

**Who interrupts more?** In one of the earliest studies of interruptions, Zimmerman and West (1975) unobtrusively tape-recorded conversations of male–male, female–female, or female–male pairs in public places (coffee shops, drug stores, etc.). The results were striking. Interruptions were 10 times more frequent in mixed-sex conversations than in same-sex ones, and in mixed-sex dyads, men initiated 96% of the interruptions. In contrast, in same-sex pairs, men and women were equally likely to interrupt. This suggests that men may use language to dominate—and particularly to dominate women. However, subsequent research did not always find that men interrupt more. One review of 21 studies concluded that, overall, there was little evidence that men interrupted more, either in same-sex or mixed-sex groups (D. James & Clarke, 1993). Another meta-analysis of 43 studies by K. J. Anderson and Leaper (1998) found again that men were more likely to interrupt than women, although the effect size was small ($d = 0.15$) and depended on the context. These discrepancies across studies may partly reflect differences in how researchers define interruptions. Some researchers consider only negative instances of simultaneous talking, such as when one speaker talks over another in a disrespectful and undermining manner. This sort of interruption can be interpreted as a way of showing dominance. However, others propose that simultaneous, overlapping talk can also be a supportive, cooperative type of speech that signals interest and affirms the speaker’s meaning (Coates, 2004/2016).

When distinguishing the type of interruption, research finds that boys tend to use more intrusive interruptions than girls in mixed-sex pairs (Leman, Ahmed, & Ozarow, 2005), and female doctors tend to use more supportive interruptions than male doctors (Menz & Al-Roubaie, 2008). Further, when K. J. Anderson and Leaper (1998) restricted their meta-analysis to studies that examined intrusive interruptions only, they found that the effect size (favoring men) more than doubled ($d = 0.33$). Though most research in this area is conducted with English speakers in the United States, Itakura and Tsui (2004) examined conversational patterns in mixed-sex dyads of Japanese university students and found a similar pattern. Male students tended to use more self-oriented interruptions that controlled the development of the conversation, whereas female students tended to use more supportive, other-oriented interruptions that helped to reinforce male conversational dominance. Thus, while women tend to interrupt more often in ways that build rapport, men tend to interrupt more often in ways that dominate
conversation. Men may be especially likely to interrupt in high-stakes, competitive contexts. For example, a study of interruptions among U.S. Supreme Court justices found that female justices were disproportionately interrupted by their male colleagues during oral arguments, in comparison with the reverse pattern (Jacobi & Schweers, 2017).

### Sex Differences in What People Communicate

**Gossip.** Many think of gossip—defined as conversation, often of a personal nature, about someone who is not present—as primarily negative. Some researchers believe, however, that gossip serves important functions, such as enforcing a group’s moral norms (Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012) and enhancing social bonds (McAndrew, 2008). For instance, gossip serves as a primary means of learning who likes (and does not like) whom. This type of social information can help people to form alliances and bond with others (Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, & Swann, 2006). That said, gossip can also be used as a form of **relational aggression**, a subtle form of aggression that is intended to harm the target’s social relationships or status (for more on relational aggression, see Chapter 14, “Aggression and Violence”). People who lack social status may use gossip as a way of gaining power when they are blocked from other routes to power. This may explain why gossip is typically associated with women more than men (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Although research on gender and gossip is somewhat limited, one set of researchers analyzed tape recordings of conversations among friends and found more negative gossip between female friend pairs than between male friend or cross-sex pairs (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). A recent review supports this, suggesting that girls and women—compared with boys and men—show more interest in information about same-sex others and more often use gossip as a form of relational aggression (McAndrew, 2014).

**Social media.** Social media offers an interesting window into everyday communications because it provides a rich source of conversational word use. Andrew Schwarz and colleagues sampled 700 million words, phrases, and topics in Facebook messages in an effort to identify whether and how English-speaking women and men use language differently (Schwarz et al., 2013). They created “word clouds” to visually represent male and female communication (see Figure 8.2). A few things immediately stand out. For instance, men use profanity more frequently than women do. This corroborates other research showing that men tend to swear more than women across cultures and times (Ginsburg, Ogletree, & Silakowski, 2003), though the sex gap seems to be narrowing in Western cultures (Jay, 2009). Women use more emotion words (e.g., excited) and more social words and symbols (e.g., “love you” and “<3”). Men use the possessive my when mentioning their significant other (e.g., wife or girlfriend) more often than women do. Men are also more likely than women to talk about objects (e.g., xbox).

Another Facebook study found that women talked about friends and family more often than men did, whereas men used argumentative language more often than women did (G. Park et al., 2016). Women also used warmer, more compassionate, and more polite language than men did, but women and men did not differ in the assertiveness of their language. These social media findings largely mimic those of an earlier meta-analysis, which found a close-to-zero effect size for assertive speech that slightly favored men ($d = 0.09$) and a small tendency for women to use more affiliative speech than men.
Other meta-analyses show that women tend to self-disclose slightly more than men \((d = -0.18; \text{Dindia} \& \text{Allen}, 1992)\) and that women use more tentative (hesitant, uncertain) speech than men do \((d = -0.23; \text{Leaper} \& \text{Robnett}, 2011)\).

Table 8.2 summarizes these sex differences in assertive speech, affiliative speech, self-disclosure, and tentative speech. Note that most of the effect sizes are small and that the findings are complex. For example, even though women tend to self-disclose more than men on average, the sex of the interaction partner makes a difference: Women disclose more than men do to female partners \((d = 0.35)\) and to same-sex others \((d = 0.37)\), but there is no sex difference in self-disclosure to male partners \((d = 0.00)\), and men disclose slightly more than women do to other-sex partners \((d = 0.13)\). Furthermore, the sex difference in disclosure is larger when interacting with familiar others than with strangers \((\text{Dindia} \& \text{Allen}, 1992)\).

**Figure 8.2 Facebook “Word Clouds.”**

These word clouds represent words and phrases that most highly distinguish male and female Facebook users. The larger the word, the more strongly it is correlated with the corresponding sex.

### Table 8.2 Sex Differences in Verbal Communication.

Researchers study sex differences in verbal communication in terms of how much people talk, how assertively and tentatively they speak, how affiliative they are, and how much they self-disclose. As you can see, most sex differences are in the small and close-to-zero ranges, with a few moderate effect sizes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>d</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talkativeness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total speaking turns</td>
<td>−0.40</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total words spoken</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>Close to zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of speaking</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of speaking</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total statements</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean utterance length</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assertive speech</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>−0.13</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>Close to zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General interruptions</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive interruptions</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directives (e.g., “Turn that off now.”)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>Zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>Close to zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affiliative speech</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active understanding</td>
<td>−0.41</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>−0.16</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>Close to zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>Close to zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General socioemotional (combination of solidity, affection, and support)</td>
<td>−0.35</td>
<td>Small–moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-disclosure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tentative speech</td>
<td>−0.23</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty (e.g., “I could be wrong, but . . .”)</td>
<td>−0.33</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedges (e.g., “I guess” or “kind of”)</td>
<td>−0.15</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Beyond Sex Differences: Intersectionality in Communication

Not all women are the same, nor are all men. Many of the communication findings discussed so far—for example, that women use more tentative language and that men argue more and show less warmth in their speech—gloss over this within-sex variability. Furthermore, because studies that compare across sex categories use ex post facto designs and not true experiments (see Chapter 2, “Studying Sex and Gender”), findings that appear to reflect sex differences in communication may actually reflect the operation of third variables that are associated with sex. For example, in a sample of Iranian men and women, individuals with more education raised more topics (a sign of dominance) in mixed-sex conversations than individuals with less education, regardless of sex (Samar & Alibakhshi, 2007). It is thus important to examine the roles of factors such as education level, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity in communication patterns.

As discussed in earlier chapters, intersectional approaches acknowledge that multiple, interconnected identities—each associated with different levels of power and privilege—shape people's experiences. In a review of the intersections of sex and race in language use, Nancy Henley found that the speech of Black women and men in the United States did not differ in politeness, tentativeness, or argumentativeness. Moreover, studies comparing college-educated Black and White women show that Black women tend to use more assertive language than White women (Henley, 1995b).

Individuals with different language or dialect options across multiple identities (e.g., across identities associated with culture, race, class, sexual orientation, and gender) tend to show communicative flexibility and engage in code switching (Houston & Scott, 2006). Code switching means strategically switching back and forth between languages and their different cultural meanings. For example, Besnier (2003) describes the language patterns of the fakaleiti, who are Tonga natives assigned male at birth who assume a relatively feminine manner. In a largely monolingual culture that primarily speaks Tongan and associates English with status and prestige, the fakaleiti use English (and code switch strategically between Tongan and English) as a means of expressing...
resistance to their marginal identities. Similarly, Moroccan women commonly use code switching between Berber, Moroccan Arabic, and French as a means of empowerment in a relatively patriarchal society. Code switching to French, which is associated with status and prestige, allows Moroccan women to gain attention and talking time in mixed-sex conversations (Sadiqi, 2003).

Code switching also occurs between dialects of the same language. For example, many Black children in the United States grow up speaking both a vernacular Black English and a more formal English that is considered standard by linguists. Research by Karla Scott shows that Black female college students sometimes use standard English to establish their credibility and intelligence in the classroom, but they code-switch to vernacular Black English outside the classroom to emphasize and substantiate their distinct experiences as Black Americans (Houston & Scott, 2006; K. D. Scott, 2000). In this way, Black women show communicative flexibility as they negotiate complex identities. More broadly, some propose that girls, women, and gender-nonconforming individuals use their voices and language as a means of countering typical gender expectations (F. L. Johnson, 2006).

Sidebar 8.3: When the “Best Woman” Is a Gentleman

Before announcing the challenges in each episode of RuPaul’s Drag Race—a reality television program in which drag queens compete for the title of “America’s Next Drag Superstar”—show host RuPaul (or “Mama Ru”) inspires the contestants with the rallying cry “Gentlemen start your engines. And may the best woman win!” This phrase, as well as many others used on Drag Race, subverts sex and gender norms and challenges the gender binary by suggesting that the same individuals can be both gentlemen and women.

Contestants from RuPaul’s Drag Race Allstars participate in the LGBT Pride March in New York City in 2016.

Source: © iStockPhoto.com/scarletsails
Verbal Communication: What’s the Big Picture?

What overall conclusions can we draw about sex differences in verbal communication? Do women and men seem to be from “different cultures,” or are they more similar? As we have discussed, sex differences do sometimes emerge when comparing the contents and topics of female and male speech. Women tend to use more emotional and warm language and talk about others more often, whereas men tend to be more argumentative, use more intrusive interruptions, and discuss objects more often. But we also see a great deal of complexity and nuance, with findings varying from study to study based on the demographic characteristics of the samples and the specific language features and contextual variables assessed.

Note also that proponents of the different cultures thesis typically draw their evidence from small studies, personal anecdotes, or the media (Burleson & Kunkel, 2006). Further, meta-analyses on sex differences in communication reveal average effect sizes in the small range ($d$s from 0.24 to 0.26), leading Dindia (2006) to suggest that women and men may come from neighboring states (such as South Dakota and North Dakota) rather than from different cultures or planets. Thus, although stereotypes paint female speech as expressive and relational and male speech as instrumental and assertive, the evidence does not strongly support these stereotypes. Instead, the differences are generally small, and the similarities often outweigh the differences.

Stop and Think

If the evidence indicates that women and men show more similarity than dissimilarity in communication, what specific factors might account for the popularity of the “different cultures” or “different planets” perspectives? Why have John Gray’s Mars and Venus books sold millions of copies worldwide?

What strategies could psychologists use to get the wider public to understand the true nature of sex differences in communication? How effective would these strategies be?

What Role Do Sex and Gender Play in Nonverbal Communication?

Beyond verbal communication, people also use a rich repertoire of nonverbal behaviors to convey meaning. Nonverbal communication occurs through nonlinguistic channels. Try muting the TV and watching two people interact. You will probably find that you can still understand a good deal of their communication. In fact, one early researcher of nonverbal behavior estimated that people express no more than about one-third of the social meaning of a conversation through words, with the rest conveyed through nonverbal channels (Birdwhistell, 1970). People can communicate power through their posture, eye contact, or facial expressions. A person may use a subtle touch, extended eye contact, or a coy smile to communicate romantic interest. And as every child knows,
a parent can convey disapproval with a stern look. Note also that nonverbal behavior can influence speech, as when a speaker raises her voice at the end of a sentence to signify disbelief. Speech tone, pitch, and inflection count as nonverbal behavior because they use sound, but not language per se, to convey meaning.

Just as with verbal communication, people have gender stereotypes about nonverbal behaviors, with women stereotyped as more nonverbally expressive than men (Briton & Hall, 1995). In fact, research reveals some consistent differences in the nonverbal communication patterns of men and women. In addition to sex, culture shapes nonverbal behaviors in important ways. In this section, we consider some specific sex differences in nonverbal behavior, acknowledging cultural differences where relevant.

**Smiling and Eye Contact**

Girls and women tend to smile more than boys and men, with a meta-analysis revealing a medium effect size ($d = -0.41$; LaFrance, Hecht, & Paluck, 2003). David Dodd and his colleagues examined thousands of yearbook photos from students in kindergarten through college and found that, starting around fourth grade, girls smiled more than boys on average (Dodd, Russell, & Jenkins, 1999). This effect replicates in photos of adults as well, although the difference emerges only for lower-status women in posed (but not candid) photos (J. A. Hall, LeBeau, Reinoso, & Thayer, 2001). The finding that women smile more than men also holds across cultures and ethnicities, though substantial cross-cultural differences emerge in both the amount that people smile and the size of the sex difference. For example, Jeanne Tsai and her colleagues found that in cultures that place more value on excited emotional expressions (e.g., the United States and France), political leaders show more pronounced smiles in their official photos than do leaders in cultures that place less value on displays of excitement (e.g., China and Japan; Tsai et al., 2016).

If girls and women tend to smile more, does this indicate greater happiness? Not necessarily. People smile for many reasons other than joy; for example, social tension, embarrassment, and nervousness can trigger smiling. In fact, larger sex differences in smiling emerge when people engage in social interactions, feel social tension, or believe others to be observing them. Interestingly, however, sex differences in smiling decrease when people occupy caretaker roles, such as parent, doctor, or therapist (LaFrance et al., 2003).

Eye contact, another type of nonverbal communication, conveys rich meaning. Women tend to gaze at their interaction partners more than men do. People also gaze at women more than men. Accordingly, the highest amount of mutual eye contact tends to
occur among pairs of women (LaFrance & Vial, 2016). Men and women also differ in eye contact in mixed-sex dyads. Men tend to look at their female interaction partners more while speaking to them and to look away more while listening to them, a pattern known as **visual dominance**. In contrast, women look at their male interaction partners more when listening than they do when speaking (Dovidio, Ellyson, Keating, Heltman, & Brown, 1988). In this sense, men's eye contact behavior is often interpreted as a dominance display because people higher in power tend to use the visual dominance pattern more.

Note also that cultures vary in their norms regarding eye contact. In Western cultures, eye contact often conveys a sign of respect while averting the eyes may signify disrespect or dishonesty. In contrast, in East Asian cultures, too much eye contact conveys disrespect or even threat, and people avert their eyes as a sign of respect (A. McCarthy, Lee, Itakura, & Muir, 2008). Subcultural differences in perceptions of eye contact exist as well. For instance, when shown photographs of unfamiliar Black and White men, White college students rated the Black men with a direct gaze (e.g., those making eye contact) as more threatening than both the Black men with an averted gaze and the White men with either type of gaze (Richeson, Todd, Trawalter, & Baird, 2008). How do you interpret this pattern of findings?

**Personal Space and Touch**

Personal space refers to the zone around people that provides an invisible “buffer” between the self and others. Intrusions into their personal space often make people feel uncomfortable. In general, men in Western cultures tend to have larger personal space zones than women, meaning that they stand farther away from others—and especially from other men—during social interactions. In addition, both men and women stand closer to women than to men (J. A. Hall, 1984; Ozdemir, 2008). Why might men adopt larger personal space zones around other men? Some suggest it could demonstrate dominance by increasing personal territory. In one study, researchers measured male and female participants on agentic traits (e.g., dominant, assertive, and forceful) and communal traits (e.g., affectionate, loyal, and warm) and then videotaped them unobtrusively while they interacted with either a same-sex or other-sex partner. Pairs in which both partners possessed high levels of agentic traits maintained the largest interpersonal distances, regardless of sex (Uzzell & Horne, 2006). Thus, larger personal space seems to correspond with having a more dominant personality. Of course, the personal distance with which people feel comfortable depends on culture as well. People from Mediterranean and Latin cultures prefer smaller personal space zones than do people from Britain (Beaulieu, 2004), and men interacting in Arab cultures prefer smaller personal space zones than men interacting in the United States (Hewitt & Alqahtani, 2003).

What about touch? In studies of touch, many of which have been conducted with heterosexual samples in the United States, girls and women tend to touch more (Major, 2012)—and report greater comfort with being touched—than their male counterparts. But variables such as the closeness of the relationship play a role. In mixed-sex, nonintimate dyads, men tend to initiate touch more than women, but in heterosexual marriages, wives touch their spouses more than husbands do (J. C. S. Smith, Vogel, Madon, & Edwards, 2011). One cross-cultural study presented people in England, Finland, Italy, France, and Russia with computerized silhouettes that represented the self and asked them to identify
where they would allow various others who differed in closeness (e.g., romantic partner, father, sister, acquaintance, and stranger) to touch them. Not surprisingly, the closer the relationship, the more body areas were reported as acceptable to touch. In addition, women allowed more touches in general than men did, except from female acquaintances and female strangers (Suvilehto, Glerean, Dunbar, Hari, & Nummenmaa, 2015).

The sex of the interaction partner plays a role as well. Girls and women generally touch each other more when interacting than boys and men do (Major, 2012), and same-sex touch may be considered more acceptable among women than men, at least in Western contexts (Derlega, Catanzaro, & Lewis, 2001). Exceptions to this general rule do occur, however. In sports, fans readily accept male–male touch in the form of long hugs or pats on the rear (Kneidinger, Maple, & Tross, 2001). In fact, sports teams that touch each other more (e.g., high fives and chest bumps) also tend to have better season records, possibly because affiliative touch releases oxytocin, a neurotransmitter that facilitates bonding and coordination (Kraus, Huang, & Keltner, 2010). Cultures outside of the United States also more commonly accept male–male touch. In many Latin American, European, and Middle Eastern countries, men commonly kiss each other in greeting. Further, in Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East, men often walk in public holding hands without any romantic overtones (Fattah, 2005).

**Stop and Think**

Why do you think that the United States prohibits male–male touch in public more strongly than some other countries? What consequences might the disapproval of public expressions of male–male touch have? Have U.S. attitudes about this changed over time? If so, how?

Of course, not all meanings of touch are positive. Touch can be used to harass, objectify, and demean. Often in these cases, more powerful individuals use touch to control, objectify, or harm less powerful others. We will return to this topic in Chapter 13, “Gender and Psychological Health,” and Chapter 14, “Aggression and Violence.”

**Body Posture and Gait**

Certain aspects of body posture—the way people hold their bodies—can communicate things such as mood, status, and dominance. For instance, people perceive those who assume an expansive posture that takes up space (e.g., spreading the legs and stretching arms out or clasping them behind the head) as more socially dominant (J. A. Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005). Adopting an expansive “power pose”—standing tall with legs spread apart and hands on hips—may even foster feelings of power and confidence that translate into better performance (Cuddy, Wilmuth, Yap, & Carney, 2015). Perhaps not surprisingly, men tend to assume this sort of expansive body posture more often than women (J. A. Hall, 1984; Vrugt & Luyerink, 2000). The tendency for men to spread out while sitting even inspired a neologism: manspreading. Men’s tendency to

**Oxytocin:** A neurotransmitter that facilitates bonding, connectedness, and coordination.

**Manspreading:** The tendency for some men to spread out and adopt an expansive posture while sitting, thus taking up more space.
spread their legs into a “V” shape became such a nuisance on crowded public subways—where manspreading can fill two or three seats—that the New York City Department of Transportation started a public ad campaign in 2014 to stop the practice (Fitzsimmons, 2014). In contrast, women more frequently assume a restrictive body posture, which means sitting or standing in ways that take up little space (e.g., crossing one’s legs or folding one’s arms close to the chest).

Manspreading might seem rude, but it may also have benefits. Tanya Vacharkulksemsuk and her colleagues ran people through a “speed dating” study in which single people met multiple different potential dates in very brief face-to-face interactions. The researchers coded whether individuals sat in restricted or expansive body postures during their dates. Even more than smiling and laughing, expansive postures made women and men seem more attractive and desirable as dates (Vacharkulksemsuk et al., 2016). Therefore, both women and men may benefit from manspreading, especially when trying to attract or impress others. Finally, women tend to use more body posture behaviors that socially engage their partners. For instance, they tend to orient their bodies toward, lean toward, and nod at their interaction partners more than men do (Helweg-Larsen, Cunningham, Carrico, & Pergram, 2004).

Sidebar 8.4: When Dominance Hurts Math Performance

Some research finds that simply witnessing male dominance behaviors can undermine women’s confidence and impair their math performance. Katie Van Loo and Robert Rydell (2014) had participants watch a video of female and male actors discussing a math study group. In one version of the video, the man displayed nonverbal dominance behaviors (increased eye contact, gesturing, and open, relaxed postures) while the woman displayed nondominant behaviors. In another version, the woman displayed dominant behaviors while the man displayed nondominant behaviors. Then, participants took a math test. The videos did not affect men, but women who watched the dominant man performed worse on the test and reported greater unease about confirming a negative stereotype.

Beyond body posture, researchers also study gait (a person’s manner of walking). You might not think of gait as a form of nonverbal communication, but the way people walk can convey information. People tend to perceive walking with swaying hips as
feminine and walking with swaggering shoulders as masculine (K. J. Johnson & Tassinary, 2005). In fact, the gaits of women and men tend to differ, and people can usually tell the sex of a walker even with very minimal cues. To study this, researchers strip away almost all information about people except their gait by attaching sensors to their joints and recording their movements as they walk. A computer then interprets the sensors and presents a minimal animated figure called a point-light display (see embedded image). Even from these minimal displays, viewers can accurately determine a walker's sex (Pollick, Kay, Heim, & Stringer, 2005).

People can also identify a walker’s sexual orientation based on gender-atypical gaits (swaying hips in men and swaggering shoulders in women), with accuracy above chance levels (K. L. Johnson, Gill, Reichman, & Tassinary, 2007). Why might some gay men and lesbians display gender-atypical gaits? Because sexual minority status is a concealable identity that is linked historically with prejudice and violence, some lesbian and gay individuals may use subtle nonverbal cues, such as walking style, as a means of communicating with and identifying one another (Carrol & Gilroy, 2002). Supporting this logic, gay men and lesbians have higher accuracy than heterosexual men and women when it comes to identifying others’ sexual orientation based on nonverbal cues (Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999). Eye contact, in particular, is an important cue used by gay men and lesbians to identify one another (Nicholas, 2004).

**Nonverbal Communication: What’s the Big Picture?**

Sex differences in nonverbal behaviors, which are summarized in Table 8.3, tend to be fairly consistent with gender role stereotypes and expectations. In general, women show more other-oriented behaviors that indicate concern for and attention to interaction partners, such as smiling and nodding. Men tend to show more dominant and self-promoting nonverbal behaviors, such as expansive posture and visual dominance. Though sex differences in nonverbal communication are not large in an absolute sense, they do tend to be larger than sex differences in verbal communication (J. A. Hall, 2006).

Why might this pattern of sex differences in nonverbal communication emerge? According to the subordination hypothesis, sex differences in nonverbal communication result from status and power differences between the sexes (Henley, 1995a). But the empirical evidence does not fully support this hypothesis. If it were true, we would expect a match between male-typical and higher-status nonverbal behaviors and a match between female-typical and lower-status nonverbal behaviors. Instead, many of the nonverbal behaviors that distinguish high- and low-status individuals differ from those that...
distinguish men and women (J. A. Hall et al., 2001; Mast & Sczesny, 2010). This is particularly true for female-typical nonverbal behaviors, such as nodding and smiling, which do not differ between high- and low-status individuals. In contrast, male-typical nonverbal behaviors (e.g., expansive posture and visual dominance) more consistently relate to status and power. Thus, the findings reveal a great deal of complexity, which is also evident in the cross-cultural variation in behaviors such as eye contact, personal space, and touch (Matsumoto, 2006).

Table 8.3  **Sex Differences in Nonverbal Behavior.** Girls generally display the nonverbal behaviors in the left-hand column more frequently than do boys and men, with the reverse true of the nonverbal behaviors in the right-hand column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls/Women &gt; Boys/Men</th>
<th>Boys/Men &gt; Girls/Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gazing</td>
<td>Visual dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smiling</td>
<td>Speech volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodding</td>
<td>Filled pauses (ah, um)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesturing</td>
<td>Interpersonal space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictive body postures</td>
<td>Expansive body postures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip sway</td>
<td>Shoulder swagger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward leaning</td>
<td>Body movements (fidgeting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posture mirroring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from LaFrance and Vial (2016), Table 6.1.

The subordination hypothesis predicts that men should show the same nonverbal behaviors as higher-status individuals and women should show the same nonverbal behaviors as lower-status individuals. But female-typical nonverbal behaviors, such as smiling and nodding, do not predict status. Why do you think the typical nonverbal behavior of men relates to status when the typical nonverbal behavior of women does not?
How Do Sex and Gender Shape the Experience, Expression, and Identification of Emotions?

Experiencing, expressing, and identifying emotions are separate capacities. Feeling an emotion does not necessarily mean being able to express it clearly, nor does seeing a friend's emotional expression guarantee that one can identify it accurately. Keeping these three emotion abilities separate is key in a discussion of sex differences in emotionality. In this section, we will explore sex differences in the experience, expression, and recognition of emotions. We will also examine display rules that govern when emotions should and should not be expressed, noting whether and when culture and sex interact to shape emotionality.

Sidebar 8.5: How Basic Are the Basic Emotions?

Going back to Darwin (1872), researchers often seek to identify basic emotions that are innate and universally expressed and recognized (Ekman, 1972). While a great deal of research finds evidence of six basic emotions (happiness, fear, disgust, surprise, anger, and sadness), debate about the true universality of these emotions continues. In a meta-analysis of studies from 42 different nations, Elfenbein and Ambady (2002) found that the recognition of these basic emotions from facial expressions occurred at better-than-chance levels of guessing. But recognition accuracy ranged from 47% to 88% across nations, and accuracy was higher when people judged emotions of their own in-groups and when judging happiness and anger (relative to the other emotions). In another cross-cultural meta-analysis, Merten (2005) found that women, compared with men, recognized the basic emotions more accurately and that sex differences were greater in countries with more economic and political equality. Given this variability across cultures, some researchers view emotions as having a spontaneous, universally expressed biological component that can also be shaped culturally to conform to local standards (Hwang & Matsumoto, 2015).

Emotional Experience and Expression

Who is more emotional: women or men? This seemingly simple question is actually quite complicated due to the multifaceted nature of emotionality. On the one hand, it may refer to how people feel emotions, meaning the intensity, frequency, or range of emotions that they privately experience. On the other hand, it may refer to how openly or frequently people express emotions. Of these two different meanings of emotionality, researchers find sex differences in private emotional experiences more difficult to study, in part because emotion is a subjective phenomenon, and self-reports are an imperfect means of accessing it. In general, while girls and women report experiencing more affiliative...
emotions (e.g., warmth and love) and vulnerable emotions (e.g., sadness and anxiety), boys and men report experiencing more anger and pride (Brebner, 2003; L. R. Brody & Hall, 2010). However, these sex differences do not always hold up when researchers use different methods, such as physiological indices or naturalistic observations. This suggests that people’s self-reports may be influenced by gender roles and stereotypes rather than actual differences in subjectively experienced emotions. For more detail on this topic, see the chapter debate, “Are Women More Emotional Than Men?”

Women have long been stereotyped as the more emotional sex. For instance, 19th-century scholars believed that the biological energy spent in developing their reproductive systems limited women’s intellectual capacity, leaving them more subject to emotionality. Men, in contrast, were seen as more capable of using reason to harness their emotions (Shields, 2007). Though scientists no longer believe that reproduction usurps women’s intellectual abilities, the stereotype of women as more emotional than men still persists today. Is it accurate? Let’s examine the evidence on each side.

Yes, Women Are More Emotional

A number of research findings show greater emotionality in women. Girls and women report experiencing a greater frequency and intensity of affiliative emotions, such as love, affection, and warmth, compared with boys and men. Girls and women also report more vulnerable and self-conscious emotions, such as sadness, fear, anxiety, and embarrassment (Brebner, 2003). Starting around the age of 2, girls cry more than boys. In adulthood, women cry more frequently, crying intensity, and crying proneness (the likelihood of crying in response to specific situations) than men (Vingerhoets & Scheirs, 2000). In fact, girls and women consistently show more expressiveness than boys and men across most emotions (LaFrance & Banaji, 1992), and they tend to convey emotions more accurately. This could stem from women having more experience with emotions.

Finally, girls and women—in comparison with boys and men—tend to use more emotional language. For example, the autobiographical narratives of girls contain more emotional content than those of boys (Fivush & Buckner, 2003), and women in heterosexual dating relationships tend to communicate more emotion than men, particularly when discussing difficult topics (Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, & Madon, 2003). Taken collectively, these findings indicate that women are more emotional than men.

No, Women Are Not More Emotional

Because most people believe that men and women differ in emotionality, they may “see” more evidence of this difference than is actually there. For example, people rate facial photographs (digitally altered to appear male or female) as sadder when they perceive the face as female, despite the expression being identical (Plant, Kling, & Smith, 2004). In one classic study, participants who watched the
same video of an infant becoming startled and agitated in response to a jack-in-the-box labeled the reaction as “fear” more frequently when they thought the baby was a girl and as “anger” more frequently when they thought the baby was a boy (Condry & Condry, 1976). These findings suggest that people may perceive sex differences in emotionality that do not exist.

Researchers also often use biased definitions of emotion. As Stephanie Shields (2002) argues, people maintain the idea of the inexpressive male, in part, because they fail to label certain emotional expressions in men as emotionality. For instance, if people exclude anger from their definition of emotion, this may reinforce the stereotype of men as less emotional than women.

In reality, women and men are similarly emotional, but they tend to express different emotions. Though oversimplifying a bit, women generally report experiencing more happiness, sadness, and fear, whereas men report experiencing more anger, contempt, and pride (L. R. Brody & Hall, 2010; Fischer, Rodriguez Mosquera, van Vianen, & Manstead, 2004). To complicate matters, while men facially display anger more than women (Coats & Feldman, 1996), women report getting more intensely angry than men (Chentsova-Dutton & Tsai, 2007), suggesting that women may mask their facial expressions of anger.

Finally, measuring emotions poses a challenge, in part due to the weaknesses of self-report methods. Self-report measures require individuals to recall and aggregate past emotional experiences, a task that allows gender stereotypes to influence peoples responses. To address this, Reed Larson and his colleagues employed a pager method to

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**Figure 8.3 Positive and Negative States Reported by Men and Women.**

Women and men reported their positive and negative emotion states on a daily basis over a week. As you can see, the sexes experienced positive and negative states at very similar frequencies.

![Graph showing positive and negative states reported by men and women.](image)

**Source:** Larson and Pleck (1999). Data drawn from Larson and Richards (1994).

(Continued)
When it comes to the expression of emotions, consistent sex differences tend to emerge. Leslie Brody (1999, 2000) proposes that these sex differences in emotional expression result from a combination of biological and sociocultural factors, with socialization playing the primary role. Biologically, girls and boys tend to display differences in temperament early in infancy, with boys often showing higher arousal and activity levels and girls often showing better impulse control and attention. These differences, in turn, affect how parents, peers, and teachers respond to children's emotional states. Socialization agents may encourage boys—more than girls—to dampen their emotions as a way of regulating their high arousal and activity levels. In this way, boys may gradually learn to suppress the expression of emotions. Similarly, girls may receive encouragement to express affiliative emotions, such as sympathy and warmth, and to avoid conflict by directing negative emotions inward (e.g., sadness, guilt, and anxiety) because these emotional expressions are consistent with the female gender role. (We will return to the topic of inward-directed emotions in Chapter 13, “Gender and Psychological Health.”)

Children's peer groups and play patterns also encourage the expression of different emotions for boys and girls. Recall from Chapter 4, “Gender Development,” that children generally prefer to play in same-sex groups for much of young childhood. Boys tend to display more rough-and-tumble play in larger groups while girls display more cooperative play in smaller groups (Fabes, Martin, & Hanish, 2003). In turn, rough-and-tumble play encourages the expression of competitive emotions, such as anger and aggressiveness, while cooperative play encourages the expression of relational emotions, such as happiness and nurturance. Consistent with these play patterns, a meta-analysis revealed that girls tend to show more other-oriented positive emotions (e.g., sympathy) and inward-focused negative emotions (e.g., fear and shame) than boys, whereas boys tend to show more outward-focused emotions (e.g., anger) than girls (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). Still, these sex differences are quite small.

Who has higher status?

Source: © iStockPhoto.com/Saykayl; © iStockPhoto.com/feedough

assess emotional states in real time (paging participants seven to eight times per day for 1 week). As shown in Figure 8.3, they found obvious similarity in the positive and negative emotional states reported by women and men (Larson & Richards, 1994). Moreover, physiological measures of emotion, such as heart rate and skin conductance, show no clear pattern of sex differences in emotions, such as sadness, anger, and happiness (Neumann & Waldstein, 2001). Thus, even though men may express certain emotions less than women do, they do not appear to experience these emotions less strongly.

Which side of this debate seems more compelling to you? Which evidence do you find most and least convincing? Why?
Display rules. Violating display rules—culture-specific norms that regulate how, when, and whether individuals should express particular emotions—can bring social penalties. For example, because women are generally expected to display positive emotions (Stoppard & Gunn Gruchy, 1993), they may be criticized or seen as unfriendly when they do not. Any woman who has ever been told to “smile more” will recognize this rule. Consistent with this display rule, P. A. Simpson and Stroh (2004) found that female managers expressed more positive emotions and suppressed negative emotions while male managers suppressed positive emotions and expressed more negative emotions. Expressing anger, in particular, can be costly for women. In the workplace, women who express anger are seen as having lower status and are recommended for lower salaries in comparison with men who express anger (Brescoll & Uhlman, 2008). Interestingly, the display rule prohibiting anger expressions in women may depend on race. In a study examining perceptions of managers, White women managers were conferred lower status when expressing dominance, but Black women (and White men) managers were not (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012). Although dominance differs from anger, it does involve toughness and willingness to express disappointment at subordinates, which can come across as anger.

Display rules also dictate that men should express powerful emotions like anger and avoid low-power emotions like sadness. In fact, others view men who express anger in a professional context as having higher status than men who express sadness (Brescoll & Uhlman, 2008). In one study, Larissa Tiedens had U.S. participants watch videotapes of then president Bill Clinton’s testimony during the Monica Lewinsky scandal in which he expressed either anger or sadness (Tiedens, 2001). Participants expressed more approval for Clinton and stronger belief that he should remain president after watching the angry clip. Further demonstrating the penalties that men receive for expressing sadness, people tend to evaluate depressed men more negatively than they evaluate depressed women (L. R. Brody, 1999).

Here again, though, display rules may depend on race. Since Black men tend to be stereotyped as more aggressive than White men in the United States, they may face penalties for expressing anger that White men do not face. In fact, ratings of photographs of Fortune 500 CEOs reveal that Black male CEOs are seen as more “baby-faced” and warmer than White male CEOs (Livingston & Pearce, 2009). Robert Livingston labeled this phenomenon the teddy bear effect, arguing that Black men who appear physically nonthreatening may have an advantage in seeking high-status positions because they do not activate people’s stereotypes about Black men as aggressive. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that former president Barack Obama gained a reputation for being emotionally calm and rarely expressing anger.

Prominent Black male leaders like Barack Obama often have “baby-faced” features. Such features may counter stereotypes of Black men as aggressive, which can help Black men advance to high-status positions. Source: Retrieved from the White House Archives.
Not only do emotional display rules differ across racial and subcultural groups within a single country, they vary cross-culturally as well. One large-scale study found that, in comparison with people from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Indonesia, South Korea, and China), people from individualistic cultures (e.g., United States, Canada, and Australia) believe that it is more acceptable to express emotions (particularly negative emotions) to members of their in-groups (Matsumoto et al., 2008). But the greater permissibility of emotional expressions in individualistic cultures may primarily extend to women because these same cultures also often have a display rule that restricts men’s expressions of certain emotions. For example, Agneta Fischer and colleagues examined cross-cultural sex differences in the expression of powerful emotions (anger and disgust) and powerless emotions (fear, sadness, shame, and guilt). Their findings indicated that men from Western cultures with higher levels of gender equality reported the lowest levels of powerless emotions, suggesting that the male gender role in Western cultures restricts men’s expression of these low-power emotions (Fischer et al., 2004).

Stop and Think

In the United States, research typically shows that women are more emotionally expressive than men. However, in some cultures, both women and men are expected to temper their expression of emotions (especially negative emotions) among their in-groups. What are some of the benefits and costs of being less emotionally expressive? What are some of the benefits and costs of being more emotionally expressive? How might the cultural context change these benefits and costs?

Encoding and Decoding Accuracy

Communicating emotion effectively through nonverbal behavior involves both accurate encoding and decoding of emotional content. **Encoding accuracy** refers to the nonverbal communication of emotion (and other types of content) in a clear manner that others can easily interpret, and **decoding accuracy** refers to the correct deciphering of nonverbal emotion (and other content) that others express. As you will see, women tend to have an advantage over men in both types of accuracy.

On average, women are more expressive than men in nonverbal behavior and facial expressions (Kring & Gordon, 1998), and they demonstrate more skill in producing nonverbal behaviors that observers read as intended (LaFrance & Vial, 2016). These sex differences in encoding accuracy seem to reflect the tendency for men to suppress their nonverbal expressions while women more often amplify their expressions.

In comparison with boys and men, girls and women also show greater facility at decoding emotions expressed by others (J. A. Hall & Matsumoto, 2004). These sex differences emerge early in life, with female infants slightly outperforming male infants ($d = -0.18$), and the differences remain consistent (although small) throughout childhood and adolescence ($d = -0.13$; McClure, 2000). By adulthood, the effect size for sex differences in decoding accuracy is medium ($d = -0.40$; J. A. Hall, 1984). In one study, women outperformed men at judging the emotion (e.g., anger, fear, and happiness) conveyed by point-light display figures who engaged in a variety of behaviors, such as...
walking, jumping, or kicking a ball (Alaerts, Nackaerts, Meyns, Swinnen, & Wenderoth, 2011). However, women’s superior decoding accuracy may not reflect sex per se but, instead, their greater likelihood of possessing gender-typed personality traits. Both men and women who are higher in female-typed traits (e.g., warmth and kindness) show better decoding accuracy (Trommsdorff & John, 1992).

Empathy and Emotional Intelligence

Charles Darwin was among the first to view emotion expression as having an important purpose as a form of communication (see “Journey of Research: Understanding Empathy, From Darwin to Mirror Neurons”). Emotions connect individuals, and reading the emotions of others helps all social animals navigate their worlds successfully. But beyond mere decoding accuracy, humans also benefit from the ability to feel empathy for others. Empathy refers to the tendency to feel what others feel and to see the world from the vantage point of others (i.e., to “put yourself in someone else’s shoes”). Empathy has both cognitive and affective components because it involves both understanding and feeling emotions. Humans are not alone in their capacity for affective forms of empathy. As discussed in the “Journey of Research,” other animals mimic the distress of their species mates, for instance. But more cognitive aspects of empathy, such as the capacity to understand the minds of others, require higher-order cognitive processing abilities that are likely rare among nonhuman animals and may be unique to humans (Heyes, 2015). Empathy plays a key role in the bonds that humans form as highly social creatures.

Journey of Research

Understanding Empathy, From Darwin to Mirror Neurons

Have you ever winced in pain while watching someone else hurt themselves? Or cried watching a sad movie? Why do we have emotional reactions to events that happen to other people? This question has long interested philosophers and scientists. In the 18th century, Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith (1759/1966) noted the curious human tendency to imagine ourselves in the situation of others and mimic their emotional states. Scientists have long attempted to understand why we have empathy and what purpose it serves.

Darwin was the first scientist to study human emotions systematically. In 1872, he published The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals, an influential book that shaped the psychological study of emotions for decades to come. Darwin noted parallels in displays of emotion between humans and other animals, and he assumed that they had the same origins and functions, which was quite a radical notion at the time. Darwin contended that emotions went beyond self-expression to serve as a means of communication. He observed, for instance, that many animals mimic the (Continued)
distress of others in pain or danger. This type of emotional mimicry is automatic, suggesting that empathy may be wired into our brains.

Darwin saw an important connection between the subjective feeling of an emotion and the physical expression of that emotion. One of the founding figures of psychology, William James (1884), built on Darwin’s ideas and argued that our physical bodies produce our feelings: “We feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble,” wrote James. The notion that physical motor movements, such as turning up the corners of the mouth into a smile, can produce a corresponding emotion in the brain was provocative but required testing. In fact, evidence does suggest that people find cartoons funnier if they hold their mouth in the shape of a smile versus a frown (Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988) and that people injected with Botox (a toxin that paralyzes facial muscles to remove wrinkles) report less intense emotions after the injection compared with before the injection (Hennenlotter et al., 2008).

Empathy takes this mind–body connection one step further by linking other people’s emotional experiences to our own. For instance, some studies show emotional contagion effects, in which one person’s emotions directly trigger similar emotions in others (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993). Other studies document a tendency for humans to mimic the facial expressions of others in pain, just as Darwin observed in monkeys decades earlier (Bavelas, Black, Lemery, & Mullett, 1986). Still others document how people unconsciously tend to imitate others’ speech inflections and gestures, such as foot tapping or face touching (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). These behaviors may lay the foundation of empathy and facilitate interpersonal interactions and bonding.

In the early 1990s, neuroscientists discovered a potential neurological marker of empathy while studying macaque monkeys. Some neurons—dubbed mirror neurons—fired both when monkeys performed a behavior and when they watched others perform the same behavior (di Pellegrino, Fadiga, Fogassi, Gallese, & Rizzolatti, 1992). Later research documented mirror neuron regions in human brains (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004). Although neuroscientists still debate the precise purpose of mirror neurons, many argue that they serve as the neural basis of empathy (Marshall, 2014).

Darwin could never have anticipated the technological advances in the fields of psychology and neuroscience. But the theoretical groundwork he laid over a century ago still guides the study of empathy, and his insights still resonate strongly today. No doubt he would smile at the progress made, and we might smile watching him.

So what does empathy have to do with sex and gender? One answer has to do with stereotypes. Many people stereotype women as more attuned to the emotions of others, better able to “read” people (think of the notion of “women’s intuition”), and more concerned about others (Fischer & Evers, 2013). In short, people believe that women have more empathy than men. As noted earlier, women also display better decoding accuracy than men, meaning that they interpret the emotions expressed by others more accurately. But does this translate into women truly being higher in empathy than men?

The answer to this depends on the way that researchers conceptualize and measure empathy. For instance, on self-report measures (see Table 8.4), girls and women report more empathy than boys and men (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004), though sex differences in empathy decrease with age (Schieman & Van Gundy, 2000). In contrast to self-report measures, empathic accuracy tests measure the ability to infer the thoughts or feelings of others correctly. For example, in one test, participants watch videos of actual interviews and try to infer the interviewee’s thoughts at various points. The results of a
meta-analysis revealed that women do slightly better on tests of empathic accuracy, but larger sex differences emerge when participants know they are being evaluated on empathy (Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000). This suggests that sex differences in empathy might have as much to do with motivation as they do with ability.

Researchers also study sex differences in empathy by examining emotional contagion. As discussed in the “Journey of Research,” emotional contagion occurs when people automatically (and often without awareness) synchronize their emotions with the emotions of others (Hatfield et al., 1993). Imagine seeing a stranger cry in response to her dog’s death and beginning to cry along with her. Even watching a video of someone crying or smiling can trigger a similar response in watchers. In fact, women tend to show higher levels of emotional contagion than men (Doherty, Orimoto,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.4</th>
<th>How Empathic Are You? The items below were taken from two widely used self-report measures of empathy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think about how much each of the statements below describes you, using the following scale:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not describe me well</td>
<td>Describes me very well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the “other guy’s” point of view.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I can easily tell if someone else is interested or bored with what I am saying.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am quick to spot when someone in a group is feeling awkward or uncomfortable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. It upsets me to see animals in pain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I tend to get emotionally involved with a friend’s problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first eight items were drawn from the Interpersonal Reactivity Inventory (M. H. Davis, 1983), and the last four items were drawn from the Empathy Quotient (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004), two of the most widely used measures of empathy. Higher scores on all items, except Item 3, indicate higher levels of empathy. To calculate your final score, subtract your response to Item 3 from the value 6, and then sum across all of your ratings. Total scores can range from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating greater empathy.
Singelis, Hatfield, & Hebb, 1995). But does mimicking the emotions of others mean that one actually feels them? Though it is difficult to measure genuine feelings, studying brain activity may offer some insight. Here, the evidence is mixed. Some studies use electroencephalogram (EEG) technology to measure electrical activity in the brain, and they find that women show higher empathic responding than men to others’ suffering (C. Y. Yang, Decety, Lee, Chen, & Cheng, 2009). However, other studies that use functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to map brain activity with magnetic fields find no overall evidence for a sex difference in empathy when observing others in pain (Lamm, Decety, & Singer, 2011).

The concept of emotional intelligence relates to empathy. Emotionally intelligent people show awareness of their own and others’ emotions, manage their own and others’ emotions well (e.g., by cheering others up or calming them down), and use their emotions effectively to solve problems and facilitate actions (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). As the name implies, people high in this tendency are intelligent about emotions in general. Curiously, in comparison with women, men estimate their emotional intelligence as higher (Petrides & Furnham, 2006), but women score higher than men on various measures of emotional intelligence. One review found a moderate sex difference favoring women ($d = -0.47$) for performance-based measures of emotional intelligence (Joseph & Newman, 2010).

In sum, compared with men, women appear somewhat more empathic and show moderately higher levels of emotional intelligence. But some of the sex differences in empathy may reflect motivation rather than ability. Of course, you may be wondering why this matters. What purpose do empathy and emotional intelligence serve? In fact, empathy helps people be moral, motivates them to help others, and prevents them from hurting others (N. Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2005). People who score high on empathy-related measures have better mental health, better interpersonal relationships (J. A. Hall, Andrzejewski, & Yopchick, 2009), and higher marital satisfaction (Mirgain & Cordova, 2007). Imagine what problems might diminish across the globe if people in general could develop more empathy.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

### 8.1 Describe how gender-related words and language shape perceptions.

According to the Whorfian hypothesis, the structure and content of language determines people’s cognitions and perceptions. Gendered language has a number of consequences. The use of the generic masculine (male-gendered words to refer to mixed-sex or sex-unspecified individuals or groups) is problematic due to its ambiguity and selective application. Some languages assign gendered articles to nouns, which may lead to gender-typical thinking more generally. Language can also reinforce gender and status differences through the use of diminutives (e.g., calling women girls) and unnecessary labeling (e.g., male nurse). At the same time, language can empower and transform by bringing cultural visibility and legitimacy to experiences (e.g., sexual harassment or date rape) that were previously ignored. Similarly, members of stigmatized groups may derive power from labeling themselves with reclaimed, derogatory terms (e.g., “bitch” and “fag”).
8.2 Analyze sex similarities and differences in verbal and nonverbal communication.

Despite cultural stereotypes of talkative women and silent men, men and women talk about the same amount. Men may intrusively interrupt conversations more often than women. Girls and women gossip about others more than boys and men, but the sex difference is not large. Recent studies of social media use find that men more often use profanity and argumentative language, whereas women more often use warm, polite, and emotional language. Women talk more about friends and family, and men talk more about objects. These sex differences in language and verbal communication are generally small.

Stereotypes portray women as more nonverbally expressive than men, and research reveals sex differences that are consistent with these stereotypes. Girls and women tend to smile more—and gaze at their interaction partners more—than do boys and men, and they also show greater ability to read the emotional cues of others accurately (decoding accuracy). Men stand farther away from others, especially from other men, during social interactions. Gender norms about touching show substantial cultural differences, but women tend to touch and get touched in social interaction more than men do. Men tend to sit and stand in more expansive postures than women, which may communicate status and dominance. Gait provides cues about both sex and sexual orientation.

8.3 Evaluate how status, power, and culture shape sex differences in communication.

Communication can establish and reinforce status and power. Some individuals with marginalized identities (e.g., the fakaleiti in Tonga) strategically code switch between different languages to express resistance to their marginalization. Moroccan women also commonly code switch between different languages as a means of empowerment in a patriarchal society. Some gender-nonconforming individuals use language to challenge the gender binary and disrupt gender expectations. Emotion can also convey different levels of power. Anger and disgust signal and reinforce high power, whereas shame and sadness signal low power. Emotional display rules, socialized early in life, tend to allow men to express power emotions more than women and may prohibit men from expressing low-power emotions.

Cross-cultural variation exists in channels of nonverbal communication. In Western cultures, eye contact signifies respect while averting the eyes can signify disrespect or dishonesty. In contrast, averting the eyes in East Asian countries signifies respect while too much eye contact may be perceived as disrespectful or threatening. Unlike the United States, many countries in the Middle East are generally accepting of male–male touch in public. Men kiss each other in greeting and walk in public holding hands, without romantic overtones.

8.4 Analyze how sex and gender shape the experience and expression of emotion.

Stereotypes depict women as more emotional than men. Girls and women do express some emotions (happiness, affection, fear, sadness, and embarrassment) more than men, but men express some emotions (anger, contempt, and pride) more than women. In contrast, physiological measures of emotion and studies that track people in their daily lives find no consistent sex differences in the experience of emotion. This suggests that women amplify certain emotional expressions, or men suppress them.

Women tend to score higher than men on measures of empathy (the capacity to feel, understand, and decode the emotional state of another) and emotional intelligence (the ability to identify and manage one’s own emotions and the emotions of others and to use emotions to solve problems and facilitate action). However, with sex differences in the small–moderate range, they are not as large or consistent as stereotypes suggest, and they tend to differ according to motivational and social factors.
**Test Your Knowledge: True or False?**

8.1. Gendered word choice can influence people’s thoughts and perceptions. (True: Consistent with the Whorfian hypothesis, word choice can influence thoughts by making gender categories more or less salient, by reinforcing gender stereotypes, and by influencing perceptions of blame associated with perpetrators and victims of violence.) [p. 261]

8.2. On average, women talk more than men. (False: Men are slightly more talkative than women, but the effect size is small and differs depending on contextual factors.) [p. 263]

8.3. Sex differences in language use emerge consistently, regardless of variables such as culture, race, social status, and education level. (False: Language use differs greatly by culture, race, social status, and education level, and these variables interact with sex in complex ways to influence whether and when sex differences emerge.) [p. 268]

8.4. On average, girls and women smile more than boys and men. (True: This is a fairly robust sex difference found across cultures.) [p. 271]

8.5. Compared with women, men tend to be better at identifying and managing their own emotions and the emotions of others. (False: While men estimate their emotional intelligence as higher than women do, women score higher on measures of emotional intelligence.) [p. 286]