Psychological Similarities and Differences between Women and Men across Cultures

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Abstract

Most research looking at psychological similarities and differences between women and men has been carried out in North America and Western Europe. In this paper, I review a body of cross-cultural evidence showing that it is precisely in these Western countries that women and men differ the most in terms of personality, self-construal, values, or emotions. Much less-pronounced gender differences are observed, if at all, in Asian and African countries. These findings are unexpected from the perspectives of the two most influential frameworks applied to sex differences coming from evolutionary psychology and social role theory. However, recent research related to social comparison and self-categorization theories suggests a promising approach to explain why more egalitarian societies can paradoxically create greater psychological differences between women and men.

The similarities and differences between women and men in their ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving have been, and still are today, a topic of great fascination for laypersons and experts alike. Few questions have generated more interest, and sparked more debate, than this one in the history of psychology (Eagly, 1995; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). This question can be looked at from at least two different perspectives. First, one may consider whether people believe, rightly or wrongly, that there are important gender differences. Research in this area is concerned with gender stereotypes and the findings are clear: most people believe, even today, that there are important psychological attributes that distinguish women and men (Chatard, Guimond, & Selimbegovic, 2007; Fiske, 1998; Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, & Lueptow, 2001; Prentice & Carranza, 2004). Men are generally perceived as dominant, ambitious, and self-concerned, a dimension known as ‘agency’ (Bakan, 1966). Women are generally perceived as caring and concerned with others, a dimension referred to as ‘communion’ (see Bakan, 1966). The perceived agency of men and the perceived expressiveness and interpersonal sensitivity of women are found over and over again, regardless of the epoch, culture or gender of those who provide the answers (Désert & Leyens, 2006; Eagly & Stephen, 1984; Glick et al., 2004;
of course, these perceptions and beliefs, even if widely shared, can be largely erroneous. Thus, a second perspective seeks an answer about ‘real’ gender differences by testing for sex differences in psychological functioning using the best scientific tools available.

Contrary to what most people believe, there are no simple answers to the question about ‘real’ psychological differences between women and men. Despite several decades of scientific research, there is no agreement on whether the evidence largely confirm gender stereotypes or not (see Eagly, 1995; Hyde, 2005). I will argue that the best answer currently is that gender similarities and differences are conditional: sometimes, women and men are psychologically similar and sometimes, they are different (Maccoby, 1990). More importantly, I will suggest that we are beginning to understand why. This perspective implies that efforts to establish whether women and men are psychologically similar or different in some absolute sense may be misleading.

**Similar or Different?**

Hyde (2006) argues that it is important for researchers to get it right in terms of psychological gender similarities and differences. Thus, she recently (Hyde, 2005) provided a comprehensive test of the ‘gender similarities hypothesis’: the view that ‘males and females are alike on most- but not all—psychological variables’ (p. 590). Taking into account all major quantitative reviews of psychological gender differences, no less than 46 meta-analyses dealing with cognitive variables, communication, social attitudes and personality, psychological well-being, and motor behaviors, Hyde (2005) demonstrates that there is strong support for this hypothesis. The large majority of the findings suggest that gender differences are small or close to zero, consistent with the earlier conclusion of Maccoby and Jacklin (1974). This is contrary to ‘the differences model, which holds that men and women, and boys and girls, are vastly different psychologically’ (Hyde, 2005, 590), a model that would be compatible with gender stereotypes. This is a major contribution and the importance of the message conveyed by Hyde (2005) cannot be underestimated. We should be careful in thinking that the psychology of women differs in some basic ways from that of men because most of the available evidence does not support such a view. However, attesting to the lack of consensus on this issue, the paper by Hyde (2005) attracted critical comments by Archer (2006), Lippa (2006), Davies and Shackelford (2006), and Zuriff (2006). Furthermore, one of the most important theorists and researchers in this area, Eagly (1995), argued several years earlier that the best quantitative evidence available showed clearly that gender differences were largely consistent with gender stereotypes (see also Eagly, Wood, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2004). This conclusion, however, did not seem to attract as many critical comments.
It would seem then, that a more-balanced perspective recognizing both similarities and differences is needed. Indeed, any approach having as its only goal to establish that women and men are essentially similar or, even worse, that they are essentially different, is equally problematic.

**Neglecting small but important findings**

A first problem with an exclusive focus on gender similarities or differences is that it leads one to treat of little importance the findings that do not fit the general rule. A case in point is gender differences in personality. Feingold (1994) presented the first major review of this domain. He concluded on the basis of a series of meta-analyses that ‘The personality dimensions that most strongly differentiated the sexes were assertiveness and tendermindedness, which are nearly pure measures of agency and communality, respectively’ (pp. 449–450). This finding is reported by Hyde (2005) as one of the statistically important differences between women and men but ignored completely in summarizing the overall pattern of results. Other studies suggest that this difference should not be neglected. For example, the work of Helgeson (1994, 2003; Fritz & Helgeson, 1998) indicates that the gender-related traits of agency and communion have significant implications for understanding various health outcomes and predicting sex differences in physical and psychological well-being. Similarly, the results of Feingold (1994) are highly consistent with Cross and Madson’s (1997) review of research on gender and self-construals. They show that social relationships and connections to others are more likely to be a part of women’s than of men’s self-concepts whereas assertiveness and independence are more likely to be a part of men’s than of women’s self-concepts. Thus, Cross and Madson argue that in Western countries, women are more likely than men to develop an interdependent or relational self-construal, reflecting the importance of social connections and relationships, whereas men are more likely than women to develop an independent or agentic self-construal, reflecting a concern for social dominance and assertiveness (for some important developments in this area, see Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999).

Even if we accept, as Hyde (2005) suggested, that for all other psychological attributes, women and men are essentially the same, this evidence of gender differences is potentially important (see Arndt, Greenberg, & Cook, 2002; Kemmelmeier & Oyserman, 2001). For example, Bourne, Healy, and Beer (2003) found that the reactions of women and men, as decision-makers confronted with military conflicts and acts of terrorism, were largely similar overall. However, when there was some form of relationship established between the parties (i.e. peace treaty), women were more forgiving of an attack and much more likely than men to try to preserve or maintain the relationship. This evidence is consistent with the stereotype that women are more caring and nurturing than men; even
if this difference is small, it could possibly influence matters of life and death, something that cannot be considered of trivial importance.

**Failure to deal with the explanation of gender similarities or differences**

A second difficulty with an approach seeking only to establish the level of psychological similarities or differences between women and men is the failure to deal explicitly with the underlying explanation for the findings. As Shields (2000) pointed out: ‘... focusing on the gender differences themselves is not particularly informative: finding a gender difference neither explains how the difference got there nor what maintains it.... our questions must work toward greater theoretical sophistication: Under what conditions are differences manifested (attenuated)? What drives those conditions to exert their influence?’ (pp. 18–19).

As social psychologists interested in causal attributions have noted, upon uncovering gender differences, or any other group differences for that matter, we are likely to feel that our implicit explanation is right (see Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1989). One popular implicit explanation is that psychological gender differences reflect biological differences between women and men (see Keller, 2005). This amounts to ‘essentializing’ group differences, that is, groups are not simply perceived as similar or different; they are perceived as having an underlying nature or ‘essence’ that explains why they are similar or different (see Keller, 2005; Yzerbyt, Rocher & Schadron, 1997). Applied to gender, this view suggests that gender differences are reflecting ‘essential’ and inherent differences between women and men. Hyde (2005) attempts to discredit this gender differences/essentializing model by negating any important evidence of differences. However, this is done by confusing the issue of the size or the number of similarities/differences with their stability/instability. The existence of a few, and extremely stable, gender differences can be sufficient to sustain the tendency to ‘essentialize’ gender differences. Considering the role of culture provides a much more straightforward approach to assess the value of the differences model.

**Gender similarities or cultural differences?**

A third problem with current work on psychological gender differences is the lack of attention to the role of culture. Hyde (2005) does not discuss the role of culture. She reviews research involving mainly, if not exclusively, American participants. Does this mean that the gender similarities hypothesis is valid only for this population? If so, this hypothesis is not a basic statement about the psychology of gender but essentially a description of the American culture. If it is argued that the gender similarities hypothesis is valid across cultures then this would mean that gender similarities and differences are invariant across cultures, a position supporting the gender
differences/essentializing model. Thus, the key issue that needs to be addressed – one that has direct implications for the stability/instability of gender differences – is not the overall level of similarities and differences between women and men, but the question of the variance/invariance of gender differences across cultures.

As Costa, Terraciano, and McCrae (2001, 324) pointed out: ‘Cross-cultural studies can provide crucial evidence on the relative importance of biological versus cultural factors in gender differences.’ If the studies documenting moderate to strong gender differences in the American population reflect the role of biological differences between the sexes, one would predict that very similar gender differences will be found across cultures, a prediction that is shared by some but not all theories inspired from evolutionary psychology (see Archer, 2006; Davies & Shackelford, 2006; Lueptow et al., 2001). As Eagly and Wood (1999) have documented, some evolutionary accounts of sex differences argue that invariance across cultures is evidence pointing to a species-specific, rather than a culture-specific, explanation (e.g., the ‘invariance hypothesis’ of social dominance theory; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

On the other hand, if gender differences are social and cultural products, then one should find that gender differences are variable across cultures. Evidence suggesting that gender differences are more important in some countries and less important in others would support the view that gender differences emerge because of something specific to the culture of those countries. At the same time, it would support the view that gender differences are unstable, contrary to the gender differences/essentializing model. As shown in the next section, there are now several cross-cultural studies showing some striking cultural variations in gender differences.

The Conditional Nature of Gender Similarities and Differences: Cross-Cultural Evidence

A major cross-cultural study was published by Costa et al. (2001), testing for gender differences in personality across 26 cultures (N = 23,031), including the USA, several Western nations, and several countries in Asia and Africa. Consistent with Hyde (2005), the results did not show large gender differences. However, Costa et al. (2001, 327) note that there is ‘an unmistakable pattern: Gender differences are most marked among European and American cultures and most attenuated among African and Asian cultures’. College-age and adult samples were available in most cultures. Similar cross-cultural variations in gender differences were observed, regardless of age. At the cultural level, the individualism-collectivism dimension identified by Hofstede (1980) was highly correlated with the overall level of gender differentiation, with individualist cultures (such as the USA) showing larger gender differences than collectivist ones (such as China). These results were unexpected by Costa et al. It turns out that a similar
pattern of variations in gender differences across cultures is found in many different domains.

In terms of self-construal, the findings from Costa et al. (2001) suggest that gender differences in relational self-construal typically found in Western cultures should be weaker in non-Western cultures (see Cross & Madson, 1997). One influential study by Kashima et al. (1995) examined self-construal among participants from five cultures selected to represent both individualist and collectivist cultures. Independent self-construal was found to vary across cultures, but gender differences in relational self-construal were invariant, consistent with an evolutionary account. However, a program of research by Watkins and colleagues does not square well with this view (see Watkins et al., 1998, 2003; Watkins, Mortazavi, & Trofimova, 2000).

Using various methods to measure self-construals across the different studies, from open-ended questions to Likert-type scales, and considering participants from widely different age and cultural background, Watkins et al. (1998, 2000, 2003) consistently found gender by culture interactions in self-construals. Watkins et al. (1998, 26) concluded their study of 14 countries by stating: ‘The gender differences [ ... ] were confirmed only for the Western, individualist countries where the females valued “family values” and “social relationships” more than did their male peers. For the 10 collectivist cultures no such gender differences were evident (contrary to the findings of Kashima et al.)’.

A similar pattern of variations in gender differences across cultures emerges from research on emotions. In their comprehensive review, Niedenthal, Krauth-Gruber, and Ric (2006) highlight the fact that sex differences are more pronounced in Western cultures. They cite the study by Fischer and Manstead (2000) demonstrating, among participants from 37 countries, that gender differences in emotional reactions were greater, not smaller, in Western individualistic countries compared to more traditional, collectivistic countries. Similarly, Brody (1997) reports a study showing that for five distinct emotions (anger, annoyance, fear, nervousness, and shame), gender differences are stronger among European Americans than among Asian Americans or Asian Internationals (see also Matsumoto, 1992). In a study of adolescents from three cultures, Singh-Manoux (2000, 93) reported the now usual ‘surprising finding ... that female stereotype of higher emotionality held true more in individualistic rather than collectivistic cultures’. Merten (2005) independently extended this pattern of results with recognition measures of emotions in an Internet study involving 42,638 participants from South America, North America, Southern Europe, and Central Europe. Participants had to recognize 28 pictures of the basic emotions. In line with the above studies, the results showed a substantial interaction between the effects of cultures and gender. Using the gender empowerment measure, a widely used index of the extent to which the status and power of women in a society approach parity with that of men, Merten found a positive correlation between this
index and gender differences. This means that there is an increase in
gender differences as gender equality increases. As discussed below, this
finding is exactly the opposite of what social role theory would predict
(see Eagly & Wood, 1999). In a meta-analysis of sex differences in smiling,
LaFrance, Hecht, and Paluck (2003) also found the surprising pattern:
women smile more than men but this difference was moderated by culture
with Canadians and Americans showing the largest gender difference.

A comprehensive cross-cultural study of values provides further evidence.
Schwartz and Rubel (2005) examined gender differences in values with
127 samples from 70 countries. They found that the effects of gender on
values were relatively small and those of culture larger. However, they also
found that ‘Culture moderates all sex differences’ (Schwartz & Rubel,
2005, 1010), which is another way of saying that gender differences in
values are not invariant across cultures. Rather, the results show that
women are more likely to differ from men in countries where gender
inequality is reduced, consistent with studies reviewed above.

Overall then, research on the psychology of values, emotions, personality,
and self-construal all point to the fact that women differ the most from
men in Western individualist countries. This is strong evidence against an
essentialist model of gender differences given that such a model expects
invariance across cultures. Furthermore, although post hoc interpretations
can certainly be provided (see Schwartz & Rubel), it appears that neither
of the two main theoretical perspectives in the field of gender differences,
evolutionary psychology, and social role theory, anticipated these type of
findings (Costa et al., 2001).

Contrary to evolutionary psychology, social role theory makes a specific
prediction related to the above findings. Eagly and Wood (1999, 421)
proposed that: ‘To the extent that the traditional sexual division between
wage labor and domestic labor disappears and women and men become
similarly distributed into paid occupations, men and women should
converge in their psychological attributes.’ Similarly, Eagly et al. (2004,
289) assert that: ‘This demise of many sex differences with increasing
gender equality is a prediction of social role theory.’ Thus, social role
theory predicts greater gender differences in countries where traditional
roles are allocated to women and men, and weaker gender differences in
more egalitarian societies, exactly the reverse of what the studies reviewed
above are showing. In short, cross-cultural research is raising fundamental
questions for which the most influential perspectives on gender differences
have currently little answers. A basic issue then, one that may have
consequences for future theoretical developments, is to explain why
psychological differences between women and men are more important
in Western individualistic countries than in more traditional non-Western
countries. Fortunately, recent studies related to social comparison and
self-categorization theories suggest some promising avenues to resolve this
paradox (see Bornholt, 2000; Guimond, 2006).
Toward a Cultural Model of Gender Similarities and Differences

The cross-cultural evidence reviewed above suggests that women and men are not mainly similar or mainly different, they can be both. In some cultures, their ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting are very similar but in other cultural contexts, they are quite different. The basic challenge for a cultural model of gender differences is to show that for the same psychological attribute, women and men can be similar or different, and to indicate when and why this may be so. This approach was strongly supported in a series of recent experiments dealing with gender differences in self-construals (see Guimond et al., 2006a). This research focuses on self-construal because, as argued by Cross and Madson (1997), gender differences in most psychological attributes (e.g., motivation, emotion, personality, cognition) can probably be explained by gender differences in the self. However, contrary to Cross and Madson, and in line with social comparison and self-categorization theories (Guimond et al., 2006a), it is assumed that gender differences in self-construals are variable and context-dependent.

Research related to Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory has shown that people define themselves not in some absolute sense but in relative terms (Buunk & Gibbons, 2006; Mussweiler & Strack, 2000; Suls & Wheeler, 2000). To determine if I am good in math, I can consider my performance on various math tests. However, I can also consider how I am doing relative to others. Research suggests that these social comparisons are often crucial (see Guimond, 2006; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). For example, Guimond and Roussel (2002) asked high school students in France to rate their abilities in science, and in several other domains. In order to examine the impact of social comparison/gender stereotypes on gender differences, participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions: either they rated themselves personally first, and they rated the typical man and woman second, or they rated the gender groups first, and themselves second. Given prevailing stereotypes suggesting that boys are better than girls in science, this second condition increased the salience of social comparison between men and women immediately before the students provided their self-ratings. As Figure 1 shows, gender differences in self-ratings were variable across conditions. In the self-first condition, boys and girls did not differ in their self-perceived abilities in science. However, when students gave their views about the abilities of women and men before giving their own self-views, there was a significant gender difference on the self-ratings: girls rated their own abilities in science as significantly lower than that of boys. These results suggest that gender differences in the self are contextually variable, and that social comparison processes can account for this variation (Bornholt, 2000).
As noted above, Cross and Madson (1997) argued that women and men differ in their self-views not in terms of their abilities in science, but in terms of independence and interdependence. Thus, the above findings have no direct bearing on their model. However, in a series of experiments, Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, Crisp, and Redersdorff (2006b) showed that social comparison is also important for understanding gender differences in relational interdependence and in independence/agency. In a control condition, they found that women typically describe themselves as more relational than men whereas men describe themselves as more agentic than women. However, these gender differences were reduced when participants were instructed to rate themselves in comparison with other members of their own gender group. Indeed, in this intragroup social comparison condition, there were no statistically reliable gender differences in self-construal, either on the dimension of relational interdependence or on the dimension of agency. Furthermore, the results showed that, relative to the control condition, gender differences were magnified when participants were induced to rate themselves in comparison with members of the other gender group (intergroup social comparison). In terms of effect size, the results of several studies consistently revealed that gender differences in the self were typically close to zero in the intragroup comparison condition ($r = 0.10$, NS), small in the control condition ($r = 0.30$, $P < 0.01$), and substantial in the intergroup comparison condition ($r = 0.50$, $P < 0.001$).

Consistent with the cross-cultural evidence reviewed above, these findings suggest that gender differences and similarities are variable and context-dependent. Furthermore, they highlight the role of within-group versus between-groups social comparisons as a critical feature of the social context shaping self-definition and gender differences. Self-categorization theory (SCT) suggests why this may be so (see Garcia, Branscombe, Desmarais, & Gee, 2006; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1991; Onorato & Turner, 2004; Ryan, David, & Reynolds, 2003; Turner, Hogg,

SCT makes an important distinction between two main ways of defining the self. People can define themselves as individuals, in comparison with other individuals. This is self-categorization at the level of personal identity. However, people can also define themselves as group members, by comparing their own group to other relevant groups. This is self-categorization at the level of social identity. In this case, the theory states that people define themselves in terms of attributes that distinguish the in-group in contrast to an out-group through a process of self-stereotyping. Applied to an understanding of gender differences, SCT suggests that women and men are most likely to differ when they define themselves as group members and social identity is salient (see Bornholt, 2000; Guimond & Roussel, 2001; Ryan et al., 2003). In contrast, when personal identity is salient, and women and men do not define themselves in terms of their gender, there is little reason to expect strong gender differences. The experimental results outlined above suggest that social comparison is highly effective in shifting people’s self-categorization as an individual (personal identity) or as a group member (social identity). Consistent with this view, participants’ beliefs about the attributes of women and men were strongly related to their own self-definition in the intergroup comparison condition but much less so, if at all, in the intragroup comparison condition (see Guimond et al., 2006b). In other words, there was evidence of a self-stereotyping process in the intergroup comparison condition, with participants using the attributes typical of their gender group to define themselves. As a result, strong gender differences in self-construals consistent with gender stereotypes were observed.

What predictions can be made from these findings in terms of the cross-cultural variations in gender differences? Very simply, gender differences should be weak in cultural settings where people focus on within-gender social comparison and gender differences should be stronger in countries where between-gender social comparisons are more widespread. There are reasons to believe that Western as oppose to Eastern cultures can indeed be distinguished in this regard.

**Cross-Cultural Variations in Social Comparison**

Festinger (1954) focused on within-group, interpersonal social comparisons. He suggested that people rarely engage in intergroup social comparisons. In contrast, social identity theory (Tajfèl & Turner, 1986), which led to the development of SCT, proposed that intergroup comparison is a central process in intergroup behavior. Much evidence has shown support for various hypotheses derived from this theoretical framework. However, Yuki (2003) has recently argued that social identity theory does not account well for the behavior of people from collectivistic cultures.
Reviewing various lines of research, he showed that intergroup comparison appears important, as predicted by social identity theory, among Western individuals from individualist countries but that ‘intergroup comparison is not a primary concern for East Asians’ (p. 168). Rather, Yuki proposed that an ‘intragroup relational model’ was more appropriate to account for the psychology of people from collectivist cultures. Applied to gender relations, this model suggests that individualist cultures would rely more on intergroup, between-genders, social comparisons whereas collectivist cultures would rely more on intragroup, within-gender, social comparisons. If so, the fact that across cultures, gender differences are more important in individualist than collectivist cultures could derive from this difference in the tendency to engage in within- versus between-genders social comparisons. For example, the experimental evidence that within-gender social comparison reduces gender differences in self-construals (i.e., Guimond et al., 2006b) would fit with the cross-cultural evidence showing reduced gender differences in collectivist countries where, according to Yuki, people focus on intragroup relations.

Although the study of social comparison processes across cultures is only in its beginning, the evidence so far suggests that indeed, Festinger’s theory of social comparison, focusing on intragroup interpersonal social comparisons, may in fact apply as well if not better in the East than in the West where it was developed (see Guimond et al., 2006a; Ross, Heine, Wilson, & Sugimori, 2005; White & Leeman, 2005). Furthermore, Guimond et al. (2007) has shown recently that, as hypothesized, between-gender social comparisons have a greater impact on self-construal (and gender differences) in Western, as oppose to non-Western, nations. Why would that be the case? Why would intergroup comparisons be psychologically more meaningful and self-relevant in some cultural settings than others?

Guimond et al. (2007) provided a detailed argument on this point considering the cultural dimension of power distance. Although cross-cultural research has focused on the individualism–collectivism dimension, Hofstede (1980) also identified the cultural dimension of power distance and found that it was strongly and negatively correlated with individualism. Power distance refers to the extent to which inequality among persons in different positions of power in a given culture is viewed as a normal and legitimate aspect of the social order (see Glick, 2006). Individualist countries typically score low on this dimension whereas collectivist cultures typically score high on power distance. Guimond et al. (2007) pointed out that cultural norms associated with power distance could have a strong bearing on the type of social comparison in which people engage.

High power distance cultures are characterized by a relatively rigid social hierarchy in which it is seen as inappropriate for people in different positions of power to interact informally with each other.
Consequently, social comparison between groups at different power levels would be relatively rare, with most social comparisons being restricted to an intragroup, interpersonal level. In contrast, in low power distance cultures, because it is seen as appropriate to interact with and to relate oneself to people in different positions, intergroup comparisons should be more likely. This important link between social comparison strategies and the hierarchical structure of a social system was probably first articulated by Tocqueville (1835) in his analysis of the ways in which egalitarian ideals can transform social behavior (see Rosenbaum, 2005). Similarly, in developing social identity theory, Tajfel (1981) discussed the conditions under which people may find intergroup social comparisons more or less appropriate and relevant. He argued that perceived ‘similarity’, which is so fundamental in the case of interpersonal social comparisons according to Festinger (1954), is replaced by ‘perceived legitimacy’ in the case of intergroup social comparisons (see also Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). In short, when people question the legitimacy of intergroup inequality, as in individualist low power distance countries, intergroup social comparisons are likely to be seen as appropriate. However, when people consider that the hierarchical structure is legitimate, as in collectivist high power distance countries, intergroup comparisons are not perceived as appropriate.

Guimond et al. (2007) found strong support for the main predictions deriving from this social comparison explanation of the cross-cultural variations in gender differences. Thus, gender differences in the relational self were variable across cultures, being stronger among participants from Western individualist countries. Moreover, this gender by culture interaction in self-construal was magnified when participants were induced to compare themselves with members of the opposite sex (intergroup social comparison condition) and strongly reduced (i.e., no longer statistically significant) when participants were instructed to compare themselves with members of their gender in-group (intragroup social comparison condition). Thus, as predicted, the variations in gender differences across cultures were shown to be dependent on the tendency to engage in within- versus between-gender social comparisons.

Conclusion

The search for basic psychological similarities and differences between women and men is a topic of great interest. Debates around this issue will prove beneficial to the extent that the question of when and why men and women behave differently is pursued. Indeed, there is sufficient evidence showing variations in gender differences across cultures to suggest that many gender differences do not reflect anything inherent to being male or female. Experimental research suggests that among Westerners, women and men are more likely to be different psychologically when they engage in between-gender social comparisons because in such conditions, they use
the attributes that are typical of their respective gender groups to define themselves and to guide their behavior. On the other hand, when the same women and men focus on intragroup or within–gender social comparisons, they behave in similar ways and gender differences are reduced. Evidence that people from collectivist cultures focus on intra-group relations and engage mainly in interpersonal social comparisons can be seen as one of the ways to explain why gender similarities in personality, self-construals, values, and emotions are paradoxically more typical there than among people from the more gender–egalitarian Western nations. Researchers interested in gender differences and those studying cultural differences would do well to make sure not to confuse the two.

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**Short Biography**

Serge Guimond is Professor of Social Psychology at the Université Blaise Pascal (Clermont-Ferrand, France) and director of research in the Laboratoire de Psychologie Sociale et Cognitive (CNRS, UMR 6024). Associate editor for the journal *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* from 2005 to the present, he is now member of the editorial team of *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*. He has published widely, in French and in English, on topics such as relative deprivation, social comparison, prejudice, and intergroup relations. He has always been interested in integrating micro- and macro–levels of analysis, something that is reflected in his work on gender similarities and differences, as well as in the book he edited in 2006: *Social Comparison and Social Psychology: Understanding Cognition, Intergroup Relations and Culture* (Cambridge University Press). He was recently awarded a grant from the Agence Nationale de la Recherche to head a 3–year international project on the social psychology of intercultural conflict and tolerance.

**Endnote**

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