

# Sex, Gender, and Evolution - Winter 2005

## Individual research paper – gender norms

**Individual Research Paper and Poster Presentation.** Your task is to analyze a social or cultural gender norm using concepts introduced in class. The research paper should describe both biological and social causes and consequences of the cultural norm. Formulate a critical question, propose a hypothesis, or evaluate one or more from the literature. We are looking for a synthetic paper here, not just a descriptive report. You will probably want to focus your study on a particular cultural context rather than trying to do an extensive cross-cultural survey, but you should address the question of whether the social/cultural norm that you are considering are universal or whether they vary. Why is/is it not universal? Why does it vary?

- What evolutionary pressures may have lead to this particular aspect of behavior, cultural, or social interaction becoming gendered? That is, how might evolutionary selection for reproductive fitness have lead to the appearance and development of this particular feature? How might conforming to (or rejecting) this gender norm affect the fitness of the individual?
- What social pressures may have lead to this particular aspect of behavior, cultural, or social interaction becoming gendered? What are the social consequences (rewards or punishments) for the individual who conforms to or deviates from this gender norm?
- Is the difference between males and females (or men and women) substantial? How much overlap is there between men and women? If the norm is highly polarized, how common is it for people to transgress it? Is violating the norm more common in women or men? Are the rewards or punishments different?
- Evaluate competing explanations of the norm—is one more credible? Could they both be right? Or wrong? Can you suggest an alternative? Discuss the social implications of your analysis (including implications for individual responsibility or social change).

You will find that your paper will have more depth for some of these questions than for others, depending on your topic; you might omit some of these issues and add others if appropriate. We encourage creative thinking; you should try to present convincing reasoning, including supporting research from the literature, to back up your ideas.

### Choice of topic

Generally, your task will be easier if you have a more specific question or hypothesis. Otherwise, it's difficult to focus and hard to know where to start. It might help if you think of a behavior or activity that is much more typical of one sex than the other. You need to ask (and discuss), is there a strictly social explanation for this gender bias? Is there an evolutionary explanation? Remember that in evolutionary terms, the hypothesis is generally that people should behave in ways that increase their fitness, i.e. the number of offspring they contribute to future generations.

Be practical. If you aren't finding relevant literature, revise your topic.

Some potential topics that we discussed in class include:

occupations that tend to be gendered, such as elementary teacher, nurses/doctors, librarians, engineers.

things such as sports, dancing, clothing, make-up, cars (see reading from last quarter), sewing/knitting/textiles, cooking, rock bands.

behaviors, such as the expectation that males are responsible for initiating potential dating/relationships, and promiscuity in males and females - attitudes and realities.

### **Organization and presentation of the paper**

Your report should be from 8 to 10 pages. Presentation is important. Use APA format (see the web link below). Your paper should be neatly typed, double spaced, 12-point type and 2.5 cm (1 inch) margins all around, all but the first page numbered, and stapled.

**Title** - A title should be short and should accurately describe the content of the paper. Omit words such as "A study of . . .", etc. A good practice is to devise multiple titles before selecting the best one.

**Abstract** - The abstract should be self-contained and summarize the concepts and conclusions of the work. Limit the abstract to a maximum of 150 words. Write this last.

**Introduction** - Set the context of your work, including the general concepts, questions, and relevant background work. Make it clear *why* this is an interesting or important issue. The introduction should contain a clear statement of the hypotheses or central questions.

**Discussion** – You will probably want to break your discussions into sections with subheadings relevant to the topic you're discussing in each section. This helps the reader keep track of the story, and it helps you keep track of what belongs where. The discussion will be the bulk of your paper, where you present and analyze ideas.

**Quantitative or graphical information** – This will not be necessary for most of your papers, but if you include such information, you should mention in the text any data that you present in figures (graphs) or tables. Explain the important features of your results that will be necessary for interpretation, don't just say "the data are in Table 1." Graphs, drawings, and diagrams should be labeled as figures (Fig. 1, etc.) with legends placed *below*. Number tables as Table 1, etc., with headings above the tables. Don't use color or 3-D effects. Cite the source of any data in the heading or legend, e.g. "(from Smith 1992)."

**Literature Cited** – You *must* document the sources of all ideas and data by citing the authors in the text of your paper, and listed the citations at the end of your paper. Cite your sources in APA formats (see links below). Any material lifted directly from other published work should be placed in quotations in the text, in addition to citing the sources. Use quotations only when it's important to use the original author's own words. Quotations should generally be a sentence or less. Making minor modifications (paraphrasing) simply to avoid quotations is not acceptable, and constitutes plagiarism (see below).

**References should cite peer-reviewed research.** Books, technical reports, etc., are also acceptable but avoid citing unpublished work or personal communications. Internet sources,

newspapers, and popular magazines are not acceptable sources. Science functions primarily based on peer-reviewed articles, so relevant information found elsewhere should be tracked to the source.

### Some tips

- Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that accurately reflects what that paragraph is about.
- Use the first person when appropriate, but the paper is not about you. The reader will assume that it's from your perspective, so you don't need to say, "I think..."
- Latin abbreviations: it's etc. not ect. i.e. means "that is." e.g. means "for example." et al. means "and others." The word "data" is plural. "The data are..." not "the data is..."
- That vs which: Describe an entire group using "which," for example "crows, which are black..." Indicate a subset of a group by using "that," such as "birds that are black..."
- "Like" means "similar to." Use "such as" or "for example" to provide an example, e.g. "trees of western Washington, such as Douglas fir . . ."
- "Its" is possessive: the bird sat on its eggs. "It's" is a contraction" it's time to go.
- The passive voice reduces clarity and obscures agency. Avoid it.

**More help** – The library and bookstore have many books on writing. The Writing Center people are happy to help you. Really, they are. Go make them smile. You can just walk in, call (360) 867 6420 for an appointment, or check their website at <http://www.evergreen.edu/writingcenter/home.htm>

The Online Writing Center at Purdue University has useful information. See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

The APA citation formats are available at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r\\_apa.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r_apa.html)

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and a violation of the social contract. It could result in you earning zero credit for the class, and in egregious cases could result in expulsion from the college. If there is any question about what plagiarism is, you should contact the faculty.

### Posters and poster sessions

The last day of class we will have a poster session. All of you will put your posters on display, and each will have a brief time when you are to be at your poster so that people can talk with you. We'll discuss this in more detail as the date approaches.

Your poster should visually present the key concepts, questions, hypotheses, and analysis from your paper. At a large conference there can be hundreds of posters on display. If the viewer can't tell within thirty seconds or so what it's about, they'll walk away. Think of it more in terms of presenting the contents of the abstract, not the whole paper. The objective is to get people interested enough in your ideas that they'll want to know more, and will talk with you. Make it concise, well-organized, and visually attractive, without glitz. Use space and layout carefully to help communicate your ideas.