

Sex and Gender: Studyguide and Review Notes#3

Adolescence

- What are the common characteristics and functions of puberty rites, according to Weisfeld? How is the one described in the film Monday's Girls similar or different? Note: you will need to see this 50 minute film on your own: Marriott library audiovisual room, ask for it by name and call number: GN483.3 .M65 1994.
- Note that fertility happens early in adolescence for boys, later in adolescence for girls. Why might this make evolutionary sense?
- How does nutrition affect the onset of reproduction in women? (whether a woman is losing or gaining weight is probably more important than absolute fat levels – why might this be adaptive?)
- How is childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age among the Ache similar to, and different from, our experience? (see Hill and Hurtado)

Nurturance and sociality

- Describe the sex differences in social style of interaction found among adults. How might the sex differences found in newborns and infants shape these differences? Do differences between men and women in group interactions increase over time, or decrease? Are they larger in same-sex groups, or smaller?
- In general, females are better able to read body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Review the evidence. What is special about angry faces?
- What is “theory of mind” and what can autistics teach us about this ability? Simon Baron-Cohen has argued that females excel at “folk psychology” whereas males excel at “folk physics”, and he sees autism as an extreme form of what male brains are good at. You can (this is optional) read more about his views and those of commentators online at:

www.edge.org/3rd_culture/baron-cohen05/baron-cohen05_index.html

- Why are females more sensitive to social cues? People have considered the effects of fetal androgens (for example, sex differences in attention to human faces in neonates), sex differences in experience, female oppression, and genes (genomic imprinting in Turner's syndrome). Review the evidence.
- Review the effects of oxytocin, and how it may relate to differences between women and men (and relationships between them). Taylor and colleagues have argued that women and men respond differently to stress. What is the difference, as they see it?
- Are females more nurturant? How might biological and socialization factors interact to produce this difference? One study cited in class suggested that young girls learn nurturance because they are more interested in young children and spend more time around them.

Androgens, dominance, and aggression

- Are men more aggressive than women? How do women and men differ in how they express aggression?

- Are men more competitive and interested in dominance striving? Most evidence says yes, although my data suggests that one must consider what individuals are competing for.
- Review the evidence relating fetal androgens to behavior.
- Is there a relationship between circulating levels of T and aggression in other species? Not necessarily; it is typically found when dominance hierarchies are still unstable (primates), and in situations where individuals are actively competing for territory or mates (the “challenge hypothesis”).
- How did environmental circumstances affect T levels in male rhesus monkeys?
- Is T related to aggression in humans? What types of aggression?
- Is T related to status in humans? I argue that it depends on whether T-related behaviors (assertiveness, aggression) are a useful weapon for rising in the hierarchy. Sometimes they are, sometimes not. T levels highest in unemployed males (perhaps T levels rise in anticipation of physical challenges in this milieu?) but in professional women. My study found T inversely related to status in U of U women. Sometimes social skills, perhaps facilitated by serotonin, are a more important way of rising in the hierarchy (study on vervet monkeys)
- Testosterone is associated with dominance striving, but the effect seems to go both ways. What happens to T levels in anticipation of competition, and after winning and losing in competition? Were the women and men in the film similar in this respect? Note that the competition doesn’t have to be physical/aggressive – the effect has been found in tennis contests, chess competition and hockey fans.