Chapter 2
Gender and Personality

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Personality is the study of individual differences and thus holds promise for a better understanding of how our gendered society shapes and reinforces differences in women's and men's attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. Two strengths of present-day personality research are particularly relevant for the study of gender. First, personality researchers gather data from large samples of normally functioning individuals and emphasize the importance of accurate generalizations of their findings to other normal samples. This methodology allows for the veridical assessment of similarity and difference trends in women's and men's personality characteristics. Second, is the attention personality researchers typically give to the careful measurement of constructs through adequate sampling of concept domains, empirical validation, and reliability checks.

Despite these potential advantages for the study of gender, the personality field has been slow to contribute to gender theory or to provide meaningful, fully validated, gender-related knowledge. Historical and present-day limitations of personality research are responsible for this lack of progress. For the first several decades of personality research, little attention was paid to women or to issues that tend to be particularly important in women's lives. Ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other individual difference variables were similarly ignored. Samples were often exclusively comprised of white men, and hypotheses were generated from a white, androcentric perspective. Nevertheless, researchers typically interpreted their data as having validity for the human personality more generally. When women were included as study participants, gender differences were usually not a focus of study and often were not reported.

A second limitation of personality research, which remains a problem today, is that most personality researchers rely on self-report as their primary source of data, a practice that is particularly problematic when variables are value laden. Although one can argue that only individuals themselves can accurately report on their internal experiences, self-reports are affected by response sets that are shaped by societal expectations relevant to gender. For example, the societal prohibition against the expression of weakness may affect boys' and men's willingness to disclose, or even to recognize within themselves, pangs of anxiety or bouts of depression. In contrast, women and girls experience fewer sanctions for expressing such negative emotions and, therefore, may feel less inhibited from doing so.

Progress in this field is further limited by the essentialist orientation of many personality researchers who have focused largely on what they assume to be inherent traits and have proposed models that include primarily distal causes such as evolutionary forces (e.g., Nettle, 2006) and the heritability of personality (e.g., Bouchard, 2004). Related to this essentialist emphasis, some personality researchers have been interested in linking observed gender differences in behavior to

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physiological differences (e.g., Sellers, Mehl, & Josephs, 2006). In this type of explanatory model, physiological variables are presumed to be based on heredity, and a one-way causal effect is assumed between physiological factors and behavior. These models do not recognize that although physiological variables affect personality and behavior, so too can environmental and social factors affect the physiological development and ongoing physiological state of the individual (e.g., Gabbard, 2005).

In this chapter, we review and critique gender-related personality theory and research with an emphasis on current issues. We begin by discussing the central importance of social factors and contexts for the understanding of personality and gender. We then describe how the personality traits traditionally linked in our society with masculinity and femininity have come to be conceptualized and researched over time and report recent research advances in this area. The ways in which these traditional gendered dimensions correspond to the five domains of the currently popular five-factor model of personality and to identified dimensions of self-concept are then reviewed. Methodological problems in five-factor research are discussed, as are methods for measuring self-esteem and self-concept. We conclude with suggestions for expanding the scope of personality theory and research to include a greater emphasis on social and contextual variables and on newly emerging personality constructs that transcend traditional indices of mental health, well-being, and adjustment.

Social Influences on Gender Differences in Personality

Despite the relatively minor role typically attributed in personality theory and research to social and contextual factors, any full comprehension of personality necessitates recognition of these variables. By disregarding them, one is in danger of committing the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) by overattributing behavior to inherent personality traits rather than to variables within the social context. For example, women as a group are assumed to be naturally more nurturing than men and men to be naturally more aggressive than women. Personality researchers seldom recognize or discuss how these gender differences may be influenced by the different social contexts men and women inhabit, which provide gendered reinforcement patterns, role models, and messages about appropriate behavior.

Feminist theorists have explained that all individuals have their own combination of situated social identities and live within complex social contexts that correspond to that set of identities. Eagly (1987) posited in her social role theory that it is these different social roles, rather than biological sex, that provide the primary explanation for gender differences in behavior. According to social role theory, gender roles directly and indirectly create gender differences in behavior. When individuals conform to and act in accordance with their gender roles, they directly confirm stereotypes about what is natural for men and women. In addition, the experiences that men and women gain by enacting their social roles indirectly shape their behaviors by influencing the confidence and values they place on particular occupations, avocations, relationships, and skill development. Thus, the observed traditional gender differences in behaviors, skills, preferences, and aptitudes are directly and indirectly created by men's and women's gender roles. It is not necessary for individuals to internalize these gender norms fully for gender differences in behavior to develop. Social pressure from others and the broader society to conform to these roles, as well as the potential punishment for nonconformity and the rewards for conformity, can induce gender-stereotyped behavior regardless of individuals' personal beliefs and preferences (Eagly, 1987).

Contextual cues influence which social identity will be most salient for an individual at a particular point in time and which behaviors are most appropriate for the setting. Although some contextual cues are obvious, such as whether one is in an organizational setting (making a work identity salient)

or a familial setting (making a relational identity salient), other contextual cues are more subtle. For example, when women have been in work groups comprised mostly of men, their task performance has been negatively affected; men's performance, however, has not been affected by the gender composition of their work group (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Miller, 2001). Eagly (1987) proposed that gender roles are often activated in ambiguous situations in which other role identities are not salient. She suggested that participants in laboratory experiments are in ambiguous situations and may resort to traditional gendered behavior in the absence of other cues for appropriate behavior.

According to social role theory, therefore, gender differences in behavior are tied to traditional social roles for women and men and do not reflect inherent gender differences in personality traits. If this theory is correct, then women's and men's behaviors should change as their social context changes; further, if they are placed in a social context that is more common to individuals of the other gender, their behavior should change accordingly to fit that context. The importance of social context in determining observed gender differences has been strongly supported by recent research on contextual factors and gendered behaviors. For example, women are often assumed to be more empathic than men (Manstead, 1992), yet Ickes, Gesn, and Graham (2000) reported, based on a meta-analysis of 15 studies, that women have been shown to be more empathic than men only when gender-role stereotypes were made salient. When participants were not asked to rate the accuracy of their empathic skills (thereby priming gender-role stereotypes), the gender difference effect size (d) was 0.04, or essentially zero (Ickes et al., 2000). Contextual factors have also influenced the accuracy of men's and women's inferences about others' thoughts and feelings. Men have displayed levels of accuracy similar to those of women in some types of relationships (Thomas & Fletcher, 2003) and when they were paid to be accurate (Klein & Hodges, 2001). Furthermore, meta-analyses on self-disclosure (Dinda & Allen, 1992) and smiling (LaFrance, Hecht, & Paluck, 2003) have indicated that although overall gender differences in these behaviors exist ($d = 0.18$ for self-disclosure, 0.41 for smiling), these differences are moderated by the type of social context. In the case of self-disclosure, men were not less disclosing than were women when participants were engaged in conversations with men or strangers (Dinda & Allen, 1992).

As further evidence for role theory, research has demonstrated that individuals act in accord with their specific power-related roles rather than with their ascribed gender role. For example, Moskowitz, Suh, and Desaulniers (1994) provided evidence that men's and women's agentic behavior in their work settings was not related to their biological sex. Instead, they found that the workers' role in specific situations determined their behavior; individuals behaved least agentically when engaged with a supervisor and most agentically with a supervisee. In addition, both men and women acted equally submissively with an individual of greater authority regardless of the authority figure's gender (Helwig-Larson, Cunningham, Carrico, & Pergram, 2004). Thus, research on empathy, sociability, and power supports the theory that gender differences in behavior are better explained by social roles and status than by inherent personality differences between women and men.

Masculinity and Femininity in Personality Theory

History of the Masculinity and Femininity Constructs

In 1936, Terman and Miles developed the first psychological test to focus on gender differences in personality. This test was designed to document fundamental differences in masculine and feminine traits (Bem, 1993; Lippa, 2001). Masculinity and femininity were conceptualized as personality traits that were inherent, natural, and healthy for men and women, respectively. In this early test,

femininity items included liking babies, liking nursing, being careful about one's manner of dress, preferring others to take the lead, and being afraid of the dark. Masculinity items included liking soldiering, liking hunting, being extremely disobedient as a child, and being able to withstand pain (Bem, 1993). Although Terman and Miles were not explicit in stating the source of these differences, they maintained the essentialist position that these differences were fundamental to men and women and represented a core aspect of their personality (Lippa, 2001).

Important critiques of this early conceptualization of masculinity and femininity were provided by feminist theorists. A primary concern with this model was that masculinity and femininity were defined as a unidimensional, bipolar construct, with masculinity at one end and femininity at the other (Bem, 1993; Lippa, 2001). This model did not allow for high levels of masculinity and femininity in the same individual, a perspective that conformed to the prevailing cultural belief at the time that men and women are and should be fundamentally and fully distinct from one another. Furthermore, deviance from accepted gender-role scripts was conflated with sexual orientation (Bem, 1993; Lippa, 2001). Bem and other critics pointed out that Terman and Miles were not measuring inherent personality differences between men and women but, instead, adherence to gendered cultural norms of the time period (Bem, 1993).

The conceptualization of masculinity and femininity as a bipolar construct was generally accepted until the 1970s when feminist theorists began to uncouple the concept of masculinity and femininity from biological sex. Constantinople (1973) published a review article in which she critiqued masculinity/femininity research conducted before 1970. She presented evidence that femininity and masculinity are separate dimensions rather than opposite ends of a single dimension and reported findings that masculinity and femininity scores correlated with such demographic variables as socioeconomic status and level of education (Constantinople, 1973). During this time, Bem (1974) proposed and began conducting research on the concept of psychological androgyny based on the notion that masculinity and femininity are two separate, orthogonal constructs and that people can develop any combination of levels of masculine and feminine traits. Bem designed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) to assess how closely individuals' self-descriptions adhered to gender-role stereotypes. "Masculinity" items on the BSRI included traits that have typically been associated with the instrumental or agentic aspects of the masculine role, such as athletic, self-reliant, analytical, competitive, and aggressive. "Femininity" items included traits associated with the expressive or communal aspects of the feminine role, such as affectionate, sensitive to other's needs, compassionate, soft spoken, and warm. Bem theorized that exclusive functioning in either the masculine or the feminine domain was related to poor adjustment and mental health problems, whereas a blend of both sets of traits (androgyny) was optimal for mental health in both men and women.

Research conducted with the BSRI (Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) has provided evidence for the premise that stereotypically masculine and feminine traits are not tied to biological sex. In fact, studies have revealed large within-sex variability on these traits, with considerable overlap between men's and women's scores and relatively small mean gender differences (Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1980; Spence et al., 1975). In addition, the finding that gender differences in masculine stereotyped traits have shrunk in recent years (Twenge, 1997) supports the view that these characteristics, once thought to be tied to biological sex, are malleable and can be affected by social context.

Sexual orientation may be one of the factors that explains the intra-sex variation on these scores. Lippa (2005) provided a summary of data from eight studies in which the expressive and instrumental scores of gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual men and women were analyzed. Women who identified as lesbian tended to describe themselves higher on instrumentality than did women who identified as heterosexual ($d = 0.27$), and men who identified as gay reported greater expressivity ($d = 0.37$) than did men who identified as heterosexual. Lippa (2005) suggested the interesting possibility that it

may be biological factors other than genetic sex, such as prenatal hormones, that underlie individual differences in instrumentality and expressiveness. It should be noted, however, that these differences between sexual orientation groups are small, and no differences were found between lesbian and heterosexual women for expressiveness or between gay and heterosexual men for instrumentality.

Given that strong relationships were not found between biological sex and the traits originally conceptualized as masculine and feminine, Spence and Helmreich (1980) proposed that these types of scales not be considered global measures of masculinity and femininity. They argued that the BSRI and the PAQ were not assessing femininity and masculinity but, instead, expressiveness (an interpersonal orientation) and instrumentality (a self-assertive orientation), terms originally proposed by Parsons and Bales (1955). This reconceptualization of masculinity and femininity as instrumentality and expressiveness has contributed to the decoupling of biological sex from qualities traditionally associated with masculinity and femininity.

The realm of gender-role traits has also been re-defined and expanded to include the notions of unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion (Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979). These terms refer to the negative, socially undesirable aspects of gender roles. Unmitigated agency refers to an extreme focus on the self that is untempered by expressiveness or communality, such as dominance, solely for self-gain and self-enhancement. Unmitigated communion refers to an extreme focus on others that is untempered by instrumentality or agency, such as avoidance of overt group conflict at the expense of oneself (Helgeson, 1994). Given these definitions, the unmitigated form of one set of traits should be negatively related to the unmitigated form of the other, and negative and positive aspects of the same set of traits should relate to one another (Helgeson, 1994). Some support has been demonstrated for these expectations: Negative correlations have been reported between unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion (Bozionelos & Bozionelos, 2003; Saragovi, Koestner, Di Dio, & Aube, 1997), and positive correlations have been reported between instrumentality and unmitigated agency and between expressiveness and unmitigated communion (Saragovi et al., 1997).

Instrumentality and Expressiveness as Mediators of Gender Differences

The conceptualization of instrumentality and expressiveness as personality traits distinct from biological sex has led to studies in which these dimensions are tested as potential explanatory mechanisms for the relation between biological sex and psychological variables. In general, these studies provide evidence that instrumentality and expressiveness account for much of what had been attributed to biological sex. Instrumentality and expressiveness mediated gender differences in internalizing symptoms (e.g., depression, perfectionism) and externalizing symptoms (e.g., lying, stealing) in adolescent boys and girls (Hoffman, Powlishta, & White, 2004; Huselid & Cooper, 1994). Individuals with high instrumentality and low expressiveness were more likely to report externalizing symptoms regardless of gender, whereas individuals with low instrumentality, combined with low social attractiveness and self-worth, were more likely to report internalizing symptoms (Hoffman et al., 2004). Thus, levels of instrumentality and expressiveness explained gender differences in symptoms of psychological distress. In another study in which gender-role traits were tested as mediators, expressiveness was demonstrated to mediate gender differences in emotion-focused communication goals (Burleson & Gilstrap, 2002). Those who were high in expressiveness were more likely to utilize communication styles that emphasized addressing, and not avoiding, others' emotions. Thus, it seems that gender-role variables can explain much of what have been reported as biologically based sex differences in personality.

Expressiveness, Instrumentality, and Mental Health

The constructs of expressiveness and instrumentality have been linked to mental health indices in both women and men. Numerous correlational, self-report studies have demonstrated that measures of instrumentality are positively correlated with self-esteem (Allgood-Merton & Stockard, 1991; Stein, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1992). In addition, instrumentality has related positively to well-being (Saragovi et al., 1997; Sharpe, Heppner, & Dixon, 1995) and social confidence (Woodhill & Samuels, 2003; Saragovi et al., 1997) and negatively to depression and anxiety (Bruch, 2002; Hermann & Betz, 2006; Lengua & Stormshak, 2000; Whitley, 1984). Similarly, expressiveness measures have related positively to general self-esteem (Stein et al., 1992; Woodhill & Samuels, 2003), life satisfaction (Hunt, 1993), well-being (Sharpe et al., 1995), social adjustment (Saragovi et al., 1997), and social self-esteem (Allgood-Merton & Stockard, 1991; Jones, Chernovetz, & Hansson, 1978) and negatively to depression and distress (Hermann & Betz, 2006; Saragovi et al., 1997). However, instrumentality has generally been more strongly related to these mental health variables than expressiveness. Only for variables that are very closely tied to expressiveness, such as congeniality and relationship satisfaction, does expressiveness appear to be more advantageous than does instrumentality (Stake, Zand, & Smalley, 1996).

The positive findings for instrumentality have been questioned, however, on methodological grounds. Because researchers have generally relied on self-report measures to test all variables, correlations between mental health variables and instrumentality may have been artificially inflated. It is certainly likely that people who purport to have a very high level of instrumental traits (e.g., assertiveness, self-confidence) would give high self-ratings as well on variables associated with mental health (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). In addition, the content of the items on self-esteem and instrumentality measures overlaps substantially so that there is little conceptual distance between the two types of measures (Whitley, 1984). A third criticism is that self-ratings have been made in the abstract, outside of naturally occurring life settings, despite evidence that situation-specific expectations and pressures can have strong influences on gender-linked variables and can create intra-individual variations in behavior across situations.

As a response to these limitations in past research, the first author developed alternative methods for testing relationships between mental health variables and expressiveness/instrumentality. In one set of studies, participants described how they responded behaviorally to work-related situations that called for a blend of expressiveness and instrumentality. Individuals who chose to respond to such situations in either an androgynous or an expressive mode experienced more positive well-being within the situation than did those who chose an instrumental or indeterminate (i.e., neither instrumental nor expressive) approach (Stake, 1997). In addition, there was no significant difference in global self-esteem between those who chose to respond androgynously, instrumentally, or expressively and those with little social support in the setting experienced less stress if they responded more androgynously (Stake, 2000). These findings suggest that, when responding in real-life settings in which both expressiveness and instrumentality are expected, an instrumental approach is not necessarily the mode of choice for high self-esteem individuals and may not lead to the most satisfactory mental health outcomes.

As another means of circumventing the limitations of previous research, the first author developed a scale to measure perceptions of situation-specific social expectations for instrumentality and expressiveness (Stake et al., 1996). This measure made possible the evaluation of links between the level of expectations within meaningful life settings and measures of mental health. As might be expected from earlier research, the more people perceived that their life setting (home, school or work) required instrumentality, the higher their setting-specific self-ratings of self-esteem, well-being, and giftedness. The more situations required expressiveness, the higher the self-ratings

of likeability and satisfaction within the setting. However, these main effects were qualified by interaction effects between expressiveness and instrumentality for each mental health variable: When instrumentality expectations were high, expressiveness expectations did relate to self-esteem, well-being, and self-perceptions of giftedness; when expressiveness expectations were high, instrumentality expectations were related to self-perceptions of likeability and satisfaction (Stake et al., 1996). In a related study, Saragovi et al. (1997) found that self-reported expressive traits were related to better adjustment when participants rated themselves higher in instrumentality but not when they rated themselves low in instrumentality. Although not entirely consistent with Bem's (1974) original expectations about the value of androgyny, these findings suggest that high amounts of both instrumental and expressive functioning yield the best situation-specific adjustment.

Less is known about the mental health outcomes associated with unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion. Research that is available has linked unmitigated agency to increased pathology, delays in help-seeking behavior, poorer adjustment after hospitalization for heart disease, and difficulty in expressing emotions (Helgeson, 1994). Unmitigated communion has also been associated with decreased help-seeking behavior and poorer adjustment after hospitalization for heart disease (Helgeson, 1994). Negative relationships between unmitigated forms of traditional gender roles and mental health are understandable, given the definitions of these variables. Extreme and negative forms of traditional gender traits deserve greater attention because they can broaden our understanding of how gender roles may negatively affect personal development and adjustment.

Understanding Gender Differences Through the Five-Factor Model

The history of the field of personality is replete with models of the structure of personality. The prevailing model at this time is the five-factor model (FFM), a simple five-dimensional schema developed from an atheoretical, factor analytic approach. As the FFM was developed, writers applied various labels for the dimensions (often referred to as the *Big Five*) or suggested additional factors, and the qualities identified for each domain have varied. However, there appears to be a general agreement at this time about the labels and descriptions applied to the FFM domains, as described later (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001).

Agreeableness refers to the nature or tone of one's relationships with others. Agreeableness comprises facets of one's interpersonal functioning—degree of altruism, compliance, modesty, straightforwardness, tender-mindedness, and trust of others.

Openness is the willingness and even eagerness to seek out new experiences and is unrelated to level of aptitude. The following aspects of openness to experience are measured: actions, aesthetics, fantasy, emotions, ideas, and values.

Conscientiousness includes elements of self-control and persistence in behavior toward long-range goals. Elements of conscientiousness are achievement striving, competence, deliberation, dutifulness, order, and self-discipline.

Extroversion pertains to the tendency of the individual to seek out relationships with others and with the environment and to prefer social activity to individual pursuits. Specific qualities of extroversion are high degrees of activity, assertiveness, excitement seeking, gregariousness, positive emotions, and warmth.

Neuroticism is the tendency to perceive one's world as threatening and difficult to manage and, therefore, to experience high levels of negative emotions. Included in the neuroticism domain are angry hostility, anxiety, depression, impulsiveness, self-consciousness, and vulnerability.

As can been seen from these descriptions, the Big Five categories are very broad, with seemingly disparate qualities included within a single domain. Some of the traits within domains have a logical relation (order and self-discipline as components of conscientiousness); however, others do not appear to have a close link (straightforwardness and modesty as components of agreeableness). There is evidence that each of the domains includes at least some aspects of instrumentality and some aspects of expressiveness (Ansell & Pincus, 2004). The Big Five are typically measured with the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R) or the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992).

The five-factor model has received widespread, international acceptance and is considered by some to provide a valid map of universal, endogenous tendencies inherent in the human personality. The NEO-PI-R and NEO-FFI have been translated into many languages and administered to cultural groups around the world to test the robustness of the model (e.g., Chinese: McCrae, Costa, & Yik, 1996; Hebrew: Rubinstein & Strul, 2006; Marathi [India]: Lodhi, Deo, & Belhekar, 2002; Russian: Martin, Oryol, Rukavishnikov, & Senin, 2000). Because some cultures are considered to be more collectivistic and others more individualistic in character (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991), one might expect that people from some cultures would be more likely to endorse traits associated with a more collectivistic orientation (e.g., agreeableness, conscientiousness) and others might endorse traits associated with a more individualistic orientation (e.g., openness, extroversion). McCrae (2001) has reported some limited support for such differences. In particular, measures of extroversion and cultural individualism were related. For example, Americans and Norwegians self-reported higher levels of extroversion than did Chinese and South Koreans. Despite some cultural differences, however, variation in mean levels of traits across cultures has been small, and the structure of the Big Five has shown consistency across cultures (McCrae, 2001). After factor analyzing data from 26 cultures, McCrae concluded that the model replicated well, particularly when the NEO-PI-R was translated into Western languages and for the dimensions of neuroticism and conscientiousness. The openness dimension has not replicated as well, and the model has been less robust in non-Western cultures (Becker, 2006; McCrae, 2001).

Gender Differences in FFM Traits

Gender differences within each of the five domains have been assessed for the NEO measures as well as for other personality scales that measure similar aspects of personality. Because sample sizes have generally been large and data have been gathered across many cultures, this work has some potential for improving our understanding of gender differences in personality. Overall, reported differences for the various components of the measures have been modest; they range in size from zero to close to one-half standard deviation across aspects of the dimensions, and the majority of effect sizes have been less than one-quarter standard deviation (McCrae, 2001). The size and the nature of gender differences have varied somewhat among samples within the United States and across cultures. Reported gender differences have also varied by the specific item content of scales intended to measure the same trait and by the mode of measurement. Added to this complexity, most of the domains include both traits for which men tend to score higher and traits for which women tend to score higher. Despite these problems, a coherent pattern of gender differences has been emerging within each of the five domains. These findings are discussed within the context of the instrumental/expressive dimensions.

The set of traits designated for the agreeableness domain tend to be associated with a prosocial, expressive orientation; they suggest a willingness and perhaps aptitude for developing meaningful,

fulfilling, and authentic relationships with others. Although significant gender differences have seldom been found for all agreeableness traits within the same sample or culture, women have tended to endorse them to a greater extent than have men. These gender differences have been reported by Feingold (1994), who performed four meta-analyses across 50 years of US personality research, as well as by researchers in countries outside the United States, such as Finland (Feldt, Metsapelto, Kinnunen, & Pulkkinen, 2007) and India (Lodhi et al., 2002), and by Costa et al. (2001), who evaluated data from 26 cultures, including the United States. These findings are in line with widespread societal expectations that women invest themselves in the development and maintenance of positive, enduring personal relationships.

The domain of openness has also yielded fairly consistent gender differences. One might expect a stance of openness to be relevant to both an expressive and an instrumental orientation and that, given societal pressures, some aspects of openness may be more common among men and others more common among women. In line with these expectations, there is evidence that women tend to report greater openness to feelings, aesthetics, and values (Costa et al., 2001; Feingold, 1994; Feldt et al., 2007; Lodhi et al., 2002). In contrast, men have shown an openness to experience equal to that of women (Feingold, 1994) and greater openness to ideas (Costa et al., 2001).

Conscientiousness may best be considered both an instrumental and expressive dimension because both successful action and cooperative interpersonal functioning are implied in the components of this domain. Thus, gender differences would be expected to be small for this domain. Indeed, reported gender differences in conscientiousness have been small and scattered, with little consistency across studies (Costa et al., 2001; Feingold, 1994). Thus, in at least these aspects of instrumentality, women and men have shown virtually no differences.

The remaining domains, extroversion and neuroticism, also include a balance of instrumental and expressive traits, and they provide a complex pattern of gender differences. Women tend to score higher on extroversion traits that can be described as expressive, such as gregariousness, warmth, and positive emotions (Costa et al., 2001; Feingold, 1994; Lodhi et al., 2002; Rubinstein & Strul, 2006), whereas men tend to score higher on the extroversion traits linked to instrumentality, such as activity, excitement seeking and assertiveness (Costa et al., 2001; Feingold, 1994; Lodhi et al., 2002; Lynn & Martin, 1997). Thus, it appears that people tend to express their extroversion in line with traditional gender expectations. The neuroticism domain comprises a wide variety of mental health variables that may be associated with unmitigated communion (e.g., anxiety, depression, vulnerability) or unmitigated agency (e.g., hostility, impulsiveness). Although gender differences were not found in some samples (e.g., Feldt et al., 2007), most researchers have reported gender differences. Women have tended to report more neurotic symptoms generally (Lynn & Martin, 1997; Rubinstein & Strul, 2006) and particularly more anxiety and depression, at least in Western cultures (Costa et al., 2001; Feingold, 1994), and men have tended to score higher on measures associated with hostility and impulsiveness (Feingold, 1994; Lengua & Stormshak, 2000). Thus, gender differences in self-reported neuroticism are dependent on the nature of the mental health symptoms included under the neuroticism label.

Little FFM research has focused on differences associated with sexual orientation. However, we might expect that, because gay men have reported greater expressiveness than have heterosexual men and lesbians have reported greater instrumentality than have heterosexual women (Pillard, 1991; Haslam, 1997), sexual orientation groups may tend to show FFM differences that parallel those found between men and women. Lippa (2005) has provided partial support for this possibility. He found large correlations between sex differences on the FFM (and on masculinity/femininity measures) and sexual orientation differences on the same measures. However, only some of the gender difference findings described earlier, which were drawn from very large and diverse data sets, were replicated in Lippa's work, which has been confined primarily to college samples. More research is clearly needed

to determine the value of the FFM model as a tool for better understanding personality differences between sexual orientation groups.

Evaluation of FFM Research and Directions for Future Study of Gender Issues

One would expect that gender differences in the FFM personality traits would be attenuated in cultures that hold more gender egalitarian values and in which women have more opportunities for education. However, Costa et al. (2001) found that gender differences were significantly greater in the more egalitarian countries studied. In explaining their surprising findings, Costa et al. (2001) suggested that people in more traditional cultures may use a different frame of reference in making their self-ratings than do people in more egalitarian cultures. Those in traditional cultures may be more likely to compare themselves to same-sex others or to attribute their actions more to societal demands than to their own inherent personality traits.

These explanations highlight one of the significant limitations of FFM research: Virtually all data have been derived from self-report, with very little validation from other sources of measurement. It is possible, then, that response sets may account for many of the gender and cultural differences reported. The issue of response sets appears to be particularly relevant to the interpretation of gender differences. If women are more open to their feelings and more straightforward than are men, as it appears from self-reports, it follows that women would report more negative feelings than would men because women would be both more aware of their feelings and more willing to admit to them. Men may, therefore, tend to underreport their anxiety, depression, and perhaps other neuroticism variables. Consistent with this possibility, when Costa et al. (2001) controlled for reports of openness to feelings and straightforwardness, women were no longer higher on some of the neuroticism variables, and gender differences on the other related scales were reduced. Furthermore, the measures of openness to feelings and straightforwardness are themselves derived from self-reports, and men may be less willing to admit that they are not open to their feelings or that they are not straightforward. If so, then more veridical indices of openness to feelings and straightforwardness are needed to determine whether even more of the observed gender differences on the FFM measures may be explained by these variables.

Another limitation of the FFM in understanding possible gender differences is that many variables associated with social roles were not included in model development, and gender-role variables do not fit well into the FFM. Saucier and Goldberg (1998) identified a set of adjectives to represent masculinity/femininity and other characteristics that might be “outside the Big Five.” They derived two clusters from the set that they identified as relevant to gender roles. Although they concluded that the two masculinity/femininity clusters were not outliers from the FFM, only one FFM domain, agreeableness, was correlated with either gender cluster. As would be expected, the agreeableness domain was correlated with femininity and not with masculinity. These findings help to explain why agreeableness is the only FFM domain to show a consistent gender difference both across all domain-designated traits and across studies. Connections between FFM variables and gender and other social roles clearly deserve more attention from FFM researchers.

The coherence of the FFM factor structure poses another challenge for FFM researchers. The meaning of the constructs purported to underlie each factor is brought into question by the wide variety of traits subsumed within each domain. Factor analysis of a large sample of FFM participants did not reveal the predicted factor structure for all scales from the NEO-PI-R (Costa et al., 2001). For example, in a Procrustes rotation, impulsiveness did not load significantly on its target factor, neuroticism, but did load significantly on extroversion (positive loading) and conscientiousness (negative

loading). Moreover, an analysis of gender differences in factor structure on the NEO-FFI revealed several problems at the item and sum-score levels (Becker, 2006). Specifically, Becker reported that analyses of men's and women's openness data supported neither unidimensionality nor equivalency. He suggested that separate scales be developed for men and women to measure openness and perhaps other FFM dimensions as well.

A final criticism of FFM researchers is that they have paid little attention to social and cultural factors that may influence the development and enactment of FFM traits. For example, Brummett et al. (2006) reported a positive relation between body mass index (BMI) and the FFM domain of neuroticism for women but not for men and a stronger negative relation between BMI and conscientiousness for women but not for men. Although the authors noted that obesity is a greater social stigma for women, they failed to consider that experiences associated with that stigma could contribute to women's anxiety and depression, core aspects of the neuroticism domain, or that, given the greater pressure on women to be slim, women would be more likely than men to channel their conscientiousness into controlling their weight. Instead, the authors suggested that women who suffer from negative (neurotic) feelings may eat more as a way to cope with those feelings and may be less likely to exercise. Thus, neuroticism was viewed as an endogenous, causal factor rather than as a reaction to the social context within which the neuroticism was expressed.

A second example of the emphasis FFM researchers have given to endogenous explanations is Nettle's (2006) effort to tie the FFM domains to evolutionary mechanisms. Nettle attempted to explain how high and low levels of each set of traits carry benefits as well as costs in biological selection and, hence, why a wide range of levels of the traits continue to be observed in the population. Although he was able to link both ends of the extroversion dimension to physiological correlates and to some survival costs and benefits, he was unable to make a credible case for the other domains. Further, although Nettle did briefly mention that other explanatory mechanisms are possible, he failed to consider the powerful social forces, such as modeling and reinforcement, that may contribute to the development and expression of FFM traits.

Recent efforts to link behaviors associated with FFM traits to social context provide evidence of the importance of situational variables in understanding how the traits may be expressed (Fleeson, 2007; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). For example, variations in the characteristics of situations as perceived by the individual, such as friendliness and anonymity, have been linked to intra-individual variations in the expression of the Big Five traits, and the relation between situational characteristics and trait expression has differed reliably between individuals (Fleeson, 2007). For example, those with below-average levels of trait extroversion tended to show less behavioral extroversion (e.g., talkativeness) in more anonymous situations, whereas those with above-average levels of trait extroversion tended to show more behavioral extroversion in more anonymous situations. Single measures of traits taken in laboratory settings are inadequate for capturing such individual differences in variations across settings.

In conclusion, the FFM research tells us something about how men and women describe themselves in structured personality questionnaires in the United States and around the world. In many instances, the observed gender differences in self-reported personality follow from what would be expected from traditional gender roles and are fairly consistent across cultures. Women report traits needed for building and maintaining strong personal relationships, and they report more openness to emotions and aesthetics, whereas men tend to describe themselves as more emotionally stable, assertive, open to ideas, and impulsive. Some recent research indicates that better understanding of the expression of the Big Five traits can come only when research methodology incorporates situational variables. Future researchers should also address how response sets, such as expectancies for appropriate responding and internal comparison norms, affect how people describe themselves

on the FFM dimensions, and multi-method approaches to trait measurement should be employed to verify the validity of self-reports.

Gender Differences in Self-evaluations

Global Self-esteem

Self-esteem has long been considered important for the understanding of personality and behavior. Although a number of types of self-esteem have been identified, the most commonly researched is global self-esteem, defined as “the level of global regard that one has for oneself as a person” (Harter, 1993, p. 88). Many studies have suggested that measures of self-esteem are related to mental health benefits, including increased positive and decreased negative affect, more positive adjustment, and greater resilience in stressful situations (see Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999, for a review). Based on these findings, self-esteem has sometimes been theorized to be essential for positive mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Given the apparent importance of global self-esteem, any findings of group differences in self-esteem have been met with concern because they suggest that a particular group may have poorer outcomes on a host of psychological factors. This concern has been particularly publicized in the case of girls and women, who have sometimes been found to have lower global self-esteem than have boys and men (Allgood-Merton & Stockard, 1991; Fertman & Chubb, 1992). Any findings of gender differences in global self-esteem have been assumed by the lay public to be large and to reflect a problem for girls and women, whereas boys’ and men’s higher self-esteem has been considered normative and healthy. These assumptions regarding gender differences in global self-esteem are particularly prevalent in discussions of adolescent girls’ self-esteem. Popular books, such as *Reviving Ophelia* (Pipher, 1994), reinforce the idea that girls’ self-esteem plunges as they enter adolescence, resulting in a crisis of low self-esteem.

A careful analysis of the research on this topic provides a different and more nuanced picture of gender differences in global self-esteem. Three meta-analyses of gender differences in global self-esteem have aggregated data across hundreds of studies and included responses from thousands of participants. These meta-analyses have demonstrated very small to small effect sizes ($d = 0.10$–0.21) for overall gender differences where men and boys have higher scores (Feingold, 1994; Kling et al., 1999; Major, Barr, Zubek, & Babey, 1999). When African-Americans were analyzed separately, gender difference effect sizes were negligible ($d = -0.04$–0.03; Kling et al., 1999; Major et al., 1999). These meta-analyses have also revealed that gender differences in self-esteem change over time. Effect sizes in gender differences have ranged from 0.01 to 0.16 for preadolescents, 0.12–0.23 for middle school students, and 0.16–0.33 for high school students. After high school, gender differences in global self-esteem appear to decrease throughout the life span. Effects sizes have decreased from 0.13 to 0.18 during college, to 0.10 in mid-adulthood, to –0.03 for samples over 60 years of age (Kling et al., 1999; Major et al., 1999). It should be noted that, although gender differences in global self-esteem vary across the life span, the size of the difference at its largest point is still small. (An effect size of 0.20 represents an 85% overlap in the distribution between two groups and is generally considered undetectable in daily life, though potentially important.) Thus, gender differences in global self-esteem range from negligible to small and clearly do not support the notion popularized in the media that girls experience a precipitous drop in self-esteem during adolescence.

The assumption that gender differences in self-esteem indicate a problem for girls is, in any case, not clearly supported by empirical data and reflects the androcentric bias of always judging what man and boys do to be normative and preferable. Recent research provides evidence that, rather than serving as a universal advantage, high self-esteem may sometimes be related to poor adjustment. Some researchers have reported that people who carry high, but unstable, global self-esteem may, when they perceive their self-esteem is threatened, engage in negative behaviors to bolster their self-image. These behaviors, such as physical aggression, bullying, risky sexual activity, and experimentation with drugs and alcohol, may cause harm to self and others (see Baumeister et al., 2003, for a review). Thus, rather than indicating more positive mental health, higher self-esteem may sometimes reflect a mental health concern. Because high self-esteem has been assumed to be unconditionally positive, and the high self-esteem of men and boys assumed to be normative, few studies have assessed this potential mental health problem. Future researchers should investigate possible negative implications of self-reported high self-esteem, particularly in men and boys.

Multi-dimensional Self-concept

Although the construct of global self-esteem continues to be included in personality studies as a potential explanatory variable, the value of global self-esteem as a predictor of human behavior has been brought into question because measures of the construct have generally failed to relate substantially to intended outcomes (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007; Wylie, 1974, 1979). Given that, as discussed earlier, high self-ratings may have differential connotations among respondents, these findings are not surprising. The construct of global self-esteem is so vague and diffuse that it has limited potential to explain individual differences in behavior.

Wylie undertook extensive critical reviews of the extant self-esteem research in 1974 and 1979. Given the limited utility of global self-esteem measures, she called upon researchers to focus on specific measures of self-perceptions that would more reliably predict behavior. Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) responded to this need by proposing a model of self-evaluation that was multi-dimensional and hierarchical. With global self-esteem at the top of the hierarchy, multiple subcategories were specified. Shavelson et al. (1976) predicted that these components become increasingly distinct from early childhood to adulthood. Marsh (1988, 1992a, 1992b) developed a set of three measures, the Self-Description Questionnaires I, II, and III (SDQ I, SDQ II, and SDQ III), based on the Shavelson et al.'s model, to measure self-concept in grade school, high school, and college age students, respectively. In an extensive research program that has spanned more than two decades and many cultures, Marsh has found that the SDQ subscales have strong psychometric properties with a well-defined factor structure that is invariant across gender at all three age groups and is generally invariant across cultures (Kaminski, Shafer, Neumann, & Ramos, 2005; Marsh, 2003; Marsh, Parada, & Ayotte, 2004). In regard to differentiation, Marsh (2003) found that, contrary to Shavelson et al. (1976), full differentiation of self-concept components has occurred by late childhood/early adolescence, with a steep drop in correlations among components between Grades 2 and 5.

The SDQ subscales were designed for children and adolescents and, therefore, are specific to self-evaluations in those areas, such as parental relations and school performance, which are appropriate to the child and adolescent stages of development. To measure self-concept in adults, it is important to identify self-concept components at a mid-level of specificity that will be germane to a wide range of adult life contexts and experiences. Measures at this level of specificity have

the advantage of providing maximum generalizability across situations with maximum distinctiveness between categories (Rosch, 1978). For this purpose, the first author developed the Six Factor Self-Concept Scale for adults (SFSCS; Stake, 1994). Beginning with components of self-evaluation that had emerged from previous research, six subscales were identified for the SFSCS through a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analytic techniques. Two components pertain to harmonious interpersonal functioning (i.e., likeability, morality) and four to aspects of agentic functioning [i.e., task accomplishment, giftedness, power, vulnerability (reverse scored)]. These factors are distinct from personality traits in that they are self-evaluative dimensions, with positive and negative poles, rather than merely self-descriptions. The six SFSCS subscales show strong psychometric properties, are invariant across gender, and have replicated with ethnic/racial minority women (African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinas, and Native Americans; Stake, 1994; Yanico & Lu, 2000).

Wylie (1979) suggested that global self-esteem measures might mask important gender differences in particular components of self-evaluations. Higher self-evaluations among boys and men in some areas might be balanced by higher self-evaluations among girls and women in other areas. Research with the SDQ and other self-concept measures has confirmed this expectation for students in grade school through college. Across a great many samples in the United States and elsewhere, despite similar levels of general self-esteem, girls have consistently rated themselves higher than boys in academic areas associated with verbal ability, in qualities associated with maintaining friendships, and in moral qualities such as honesty, trustworthiness, and spirituality (Kaminski et al., 2005; Marsh, 2003, 2004; Shapka & Keating; 2005; Wilgenbusch & Merrell, 1999). Boys have consistently rated themselves higher in academic areas associated with mathematical ability, in physical/athletic abilities, in emotional stability, and in appearance (Kaminski et al., 2005; Marsh, 2003, 2004; Shapka & Keating, 2005; Wilgenbusch & Merrell, 1999). Girls and boys show little difference in their self-views pertaining to school in general, parent/family relationships, happiness, and relationships with the other sex (Marsh, 2003; Wilgenbusch & Merrell, 1999). These differences follow, for the most part, the instrumental/expressive distinction discussed earlier and seen in the FFM research.

Findings from the SRSCS have been consistent with the patterns described above for child and adolescent samples. Composite scores on the SFSCS, which represent a type of global self-evaluation index, have been highly similar for women and men. At the same time, gender differences in sources of self-esteem are evident and parallel the instrumental/expressive distinction (Stake, 1992, 1994). Women have evaluated themselves more highly than have men on likeability and moral qualities, whereas men have rated themselves more highly than have women on power, (in)vulnerability, and giftedness. (Men and women described themselves similarly on the task accomplishment subscale.) These findings are consistent with earlier adult self-concept research that shows women to have more positive self-concepts in the areas of interpersonal relationships and moral goodness and men to have more favorable self-concepts in the areas of leadership, persuasiveness, and emotional stability (Stake, 1992).

The multi-dimensional approach to the study of self-evaluation opens many avenues for research on gender and self-concept that are not possible with global scales. A key issue is the development of gender differences in childhood and adolescence. Although self-concept components continue to become more differentiated during the grade school years, Marsh (2003) has found that gender differences on the SDQ subscales appear as early as Grade 1 and persist through the childhood and adolescent years in a similar pattern. A meta-analysis of data from more than 19,000 elementary and high school students revealed consistent gender differences for the majority of self-concept components beginning in the elementary school years (Wilgenbusch & Merrell, 1999). Some interesting exceptions were uncovered in this meta-analysis, however, that suggest developmental changes that should be further researched. For example, boys were found to have a slightly higher academic

self-esteem than girls in elementary school, whereas this difference was not seen in high school. Further, boys gave only slightly higher self-ratings of appearance than did girls in elementary school, but this difference was stronger in high school—in the moderate range. These changes over time suggest some fluidity in gender-related self-evaluations from grade school to high school and, therefore, the possibility for effective interventions when low or high self-evaluations may signal potential mental health concerns (Marsh, 2004).

Another self-concept topic that can be better investigated with multi-dimensional scales is the influence of social context on self-evaluations. Eagly (1987) proposed that gender differences are exaggerated when observations and self-ratings are made under abstract laboratory conditions rather than in meaningful life contexts because study participants rely more on gender stereotypes when they have few cues about appropriate responding. To address this possibility, the first author (Stake, 1992) compared the pattern of gender differences in SFSCS self-ratings when made in the abstract to those made within specific, meaningful life contexts from the perspective of target persons and knowledgeable observers. Contrary to Eagly's hypothesis, the gendered patterns for self-evaluations derived from target persons for work, school, and family settings were very similar to those found with abstract ratings. Moreover, the same gendered pattern emerged when observers familiar with the target persons within those life contexts gave their estimates of how the target persons would rate themselves. Thus, the tendency for women and men to draw their positive self-views from different sources appears to be quite stable across life settings and has been corroborated by informed observers. It is important to note, however, that these gender differences accounted for only 3–7% of the variance in self-ratings. This modest amount of explained variance is equivalent to that reported for most variables that have an established relationship to gender.

Directions for Future Research

Social and Situational Contexts

Given the need to understand personality within social contexts, it is important that future personality researchers place greater emphasis on the intersection of personality and situational variables. To do so, a number of methodological issues must be addressed. First, the scope of social contexts should be defined and described. Although there have been attempts to develop a taxonomy of social situations, these efforts have had little success because of the vast numbers of potential situations to be categorized (Yang, Read, & Miller, 2006). Perhaps a more useful way to conceptualize social context is through social roles because this approach provides for a broader view of social context (Roberts, 2007; Stryker, 2007). Social roles have been defined as a "set of behavioral expectations attached to a position in an organized set of social relationships" (Stryker, 2007, p. 1083). Based on this definition, social roles can be conceptualized as "conglomerations of situations that all share a common thread of expectations and behavioral signatures" (Roberts, 2007, p. 1073). For example, leadership can be assessed across a variety of situations and interactions (e.g., work, community activities) in which the individual is expected to take on a leadership role. This conceptualization of social roles and related contexts is particularly useful because it parallels the notion of personality traits as predispositions to engage in similar types of behaviors across situations.

A second issue in conducting this type of research is the method through which situational factors are introduced to study participants. When social context has been included in personality research designs, participants have often been asked directly to imagine themselves in a situation or role and then to respond to questions as though they were in the situation (Heller, Watson, Komar, Min, &

Perunovic, 2007). This method is susceptible to the influence of social desirability bias and stereotypes because participants may answer based on how they think they should feel or behave in these situations, rather than on how they might actually feel or behave (Heller et al., 2007). Researchers should therefore consider alternative methods for studying situational influences, such as the use of diaries or the manipulation of the salience of social context during administration of personality measures (Heller et al., 2007).

Another important point in designing research in this area is to avoid a dualistic approach that creates a false dichotomy between personality traits and social context. A more complex, interactional perspective is needed, one that recognizes that personality traits and social context have a nonrecursive relationship, as each affects the other. Through such an approach, we can come to a better understanding of personality as both stable and variable. One example of a more integrative methodology for personality/context research is the measurement of intra-individual variability or how much individuals vary around their central tendency for a certain trait across situations (Fleeson, 2007). Another example can be found in the Personality and Role Identity Structural Model (PRISM; Wood & Roberts, 2006), which provides a hierarchical framework for nesting individuals' various role identities (how they perceive themselves within certain contexts) within their general identity (how they perceive their general personality). By determining stability in broad personality constructs, we can gain knowledge regarding individual differences, and by addressing intra-person variability, we can increase our knowledge of factors that influence the expression of behavior within settings (Fleeson, 2007).

Personality researchers have devoted their efforts almost entirely to quantitative studies; yet, such studies are limited in their potential to elucidate complex interactions among nets of personality and situational variables. A quite different methodological approach for assessing meaningful situational categories and exploring the influence of social contexts is qualitative research. In contrast to quantitative studies, grounded, ecological approaches do not impose preconceived structures on study participants but rather allow them to explain what is meaningful within their own experience. Qualitative researchers emphasize the importance of gaining the trust of participants so that they are willing to provide veridical, nondefensive accounts of their lived experiences. Such approaches can potentially lead to greater insight into meaningful categorizations of situational variables and their relation to the expression of personality characteristics.

The link between social context and personality constructs is particularly important for the study of gender and personality. Feminist theorists have criticized psychology researchers for accepting findings of gender differences as an endpoint of research, thereby promoting an essentialist view of gender. They argue that gender differences should be seen as a starting point for research to investigate the underlying causes of these differences (Crawford & Unger, 2004; Yoder, 2003). As discussed in this chapter, research on social context suggests that what differences do exist may be better explained by social roles and situational contexts rather than by biological sex. Future researchers should critically examine findings of gender differences in personality research and assess the role of social factors in bringing about those observed differences.

Promising Directions for Studying Wellness and Transcendence

Psychology as a discipline has, in general, tended to focus on problematic and pathological characteristics and behavior. Even in the field of personality, which is by definition focused on normal functioning and normal populations, little research has been directed toward the study of healthy living, resilience, or transcendence from adversity. Three personality constructs have emerged that

appear to be promising steps in that direction and are refreshingly free of traditional gender connotations. *Experience of pleasure* is a construct defined as the individual's ability or willingness to experience enjoyment in everyday life events (Gard, Gard, Kring, & John, 2006). Defined as a trait disposition, the experience of pleasure may be consummatory—the resolution of desire—or may be the anticipation of the future fulfillment of a goal. The Temporal Experience of Pleasure Scale (TEPS; Gard et al., 2006) was designed to measure both consummatory pleasure (e.g., "I appreciate the beauty of a fresh snowfall") and anticipatory pleasure (e.g., "Looking forward to a pleasurable experience is in itself pleasurable"). The TEPS appears to have good psychometric qualities: There is evidence for the distinction between consummatory and anticipatory pleasure and for low correlations with social desirability, positive affect, and negative affect. Further attention to this construct is warranted because the ability to experience pleasure, particularly in the types of everyday experiences described in the TEPS, may well lead to higher life satisfaction for both women and men. It is interesting to find preliminary evidence that women have scored higher on both the Consummatory and Anticipatory subscales of the TEPS, with effect sizes in the moderate range ($d = 0.42$ and 0.49, respectively) and on the total TEPS ($d = 0.55$; Gard et al., 2006). If women do tend to draw more pleasure from everyday events, such a finding might help to explain the lower incidence of dangerous risk taking, substance abuse, and anti-social behavior in women.

Sense of Coherence

Sense of coherence (SOC) refers to a world perspective that provides meaning to the individual's experience and that leads to successful coping and resilience under stress (Antonovsky, 1987). This model comprises three themes: (a) comprehensibility—the perspective that one's situation and experiences are understandable and can be explained within a credible belief system; (b) manageability—the assessment that one has the necessary resources to meet life circumstances; and (c) meaningfulness—the belief that life demands are worth one's investment and engagement. Feldt et al. (2007) reported that a measure designed to assess SOC appears to be stable across time, particularly for people over age 30 (stability coefficients = 0.67–0.82). Nevertheless, Feldt et al. (2007) have claimed that SOC develops over time from life experiences and does not, as do personality traits, represent innate tendencies. They have difficulty in making this distinction, however, partly because SOC has been highly related ($r > -0.70$) to neuroticism, which is viewed as a central aspect of personality. The value of the SOC construct is that the focus of study is directed toward understanding characteristics of the individual that promote health and wellness. Little empirical research is available on this topic thus far, but women and men do not appear to be distinctly different in their SOC (Feldt et al., 2007). Future researchers should consider ways in which all individuals may benefit from a strong sense of coherence.

A third new development in personality research is *self-compassion,* which refers to (a) showing kindness and understanding toward oneself in difficult times rather than becoming self-critical and judgmental, (b) understanding that one's hardships and inadequacies are shared by others as part of the human experience rather than being particular to the self, and (c) allowing painful thoughts to be experienced mindfully rather than either suppressing them or becoming overly identified with them (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003) has been shown to have strong psychometric properties; relates positively to measures of life satisfaction, capacity for intimacy, and regulation of affect; and is negatively related to depression and anxiety (Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2007). Gilbert (2005) has explained that self-compassionate people enjoy feelings

of well-being because they can soothe themselves when faced with adversity and failure, and they experience a continued feeling of being cared for by the self and feeling emotionally connected to others.

Self-compassion has been compared to self-esteem. Both qualities provide the benefits of positive self-affect and self-acceptance; however, unlike self-compassion, the maintenance of high self-esteem may depend on distorted, overly positive evaluations of the self and may be unstable across performance outcomes. Because self-compassion does not require positive evaluations of one's ability and judgments that the self is better than others, it may relate more consistently to mental health. Self-esteem may be viewed as more relevant to the instrumental realm, whereas self-compassion appears to be a more expressive characteristic. Thus, women may be somewhat more capable of and prone to self-compassion than are men. However, because women are typically expected to care for others, giving priority to others over themselves, they may tend to be less self-compassionate in some respects than are men. Given that self-compassion leads to the benefits of self-esteem without the potential costs, further investigation of this construct and of methods for enhancing self-compassion in women and men appears to be a fruitful avenue of research. Indeed, as Neff et al. (2007) have recommended, programs designed to develop self-compassion may be far more effective than self-esteem enhancement programs for the promotion of mental health.

Conclusions

The field of personality continues to hold promise as a means of elucidating how gendered processes and structures in our society influence human behavior. However, to date, much personality research has been designed and interpreted through an essentialist lens, and the field has been slow to consider the interface of personality and contextual factors. More emphasis is needed on capturing the subtle and ongoing interplay of relationships between peoples' personality tendencies and situational cues, opportunities, and pressures, as well as the long-term effects of environments on the individual. Alternate methodological approaches are needed to accomplish this task, and more recent research paradigms are emerging that place more emphasis on person/context connections and that measure intrapersonal as well as interpersonal variation in cognition, affect, and behavior. Although quantitative research methods can harvest a wealth of data to inform our understanding of gender, qualitative methodologies can provide an important means of moving beyond essentialist paradigms to enlighten our understanding of the salient contextual and cultural influences that shape people's gendered behavior.

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