

# Many reported gender differences may actually be power differences, researchers suggest

February 28 2024

---



Overall comparison of the experimental power literature and sex/gender difference meta-analyses. Overall, 70.6% of sex/gender differences were consistent with the effects of experimentally induced power differences, whereas only 7.8% were inconsistent. When highpower individuals scored higher on an outcome, men tended to also score higher on that outcome. Similarly, when low-power individuals scored higher on an outcome, women tended to score higher on that outcome. Credit: Galinsky et al

Why do men and women seem so different? According to a study, a wide range of gender differences that have been attributed to biological sex may actually be due to differences in power.

Psychological differences between men and women have multiple

possible explanations, including [natural selection](#) for sex-specific adaptations on the one hand and socialization processes on the other hand.

Contributing to this debate, Adam D. Galinsky and colleagues took advantage of a recent boom in sex/gender difference meta-analyses and a separate boom in psychological experiments that varies who has more versus less power. Their analyses explored whether some reported [sex/gender differences](#) are actually due to the fact that men tend to have more power than women in society. The work is [published](#) in the journal *PNAS Nexus*.

For example, studies on sex/gender differences show that men tend to display more agency than women and that women tend to be more interpersonally sensitive than men. But many studies that randomly assign some individuals to [high power](#) and others to low power find that those with power exhibit more agency and those without power are more sensitive towards others.

Linking these experimental findings on power with sex difference meta-analyses, the authors found that of 102 outcomes associated with men, 72 were also empirically linked to people with power, whereas only eight outcomes associated with women were also associated with power.

Men and people with power tend to display higher agency, more positive self-evaluations, lower empathy and sociability, and higher performance on spatial and creative tasks compared to low-power individuals and women.

According to the authors, this strong connection between sex differences and power differences suggests that many sex/gender differences may be driven, at least in part, by power differences between men and [women](#).

**More information:** Adam D Galinsky et al, Are many sex/gender differences really power differences?, *PNAS Nexus* (2024). DOI: [10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae025](https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae025)

Provided by PNAS Nexus

Citation: Many reported gender differences may actually be power differences, researchers suggest (2024, February 28) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-gender-differences-power.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.