

Sex and gender differences in psychopathology

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Cynthia Hartung's recently published article recommends more consistently and systematically considering sex and gender in all aspects of psychopathology research. Hartung, an associate professor and director of the Psychology Clinic in the University of Wyoming's Department of Psychology, co-wrote the article with Elizabeth Lefler, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Northern Iowa.

The article was released recently in *Psychological Bulletin*. The journal is published by the American Psychological Association and, according to Narina Nunez, UW Department of Psychology head, is one of the most respected journals in the field.

"The role of sex and [gender](#) in [mental health disorders](#) has been understudied," Hartung says. "As a field, we went from consistently excluding either males or females from our studies to including both sexes but not analyzing data separately for males and females. Thus, we went from gender-biased research to gender-neutral research. Gender-neutral research is problematic because it limits our understanding of mental illness in all people."

In "Sex and Gender in Psychopathology: DSM-5 and Beyond," Hartung and Lefler reviewed existing theories for interpreting sex differences in [psychopathology](#), which is the scientific study of mental disorders. They evaluated data from major journals and concluded that researchers often include both sexes but do not consistently analyze data by sex, which limits practical applications.

Rates of mental health problems for males and females as presented in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) also

were reviewed, and Hartung and Lefler systematically compared this information to the literature for select disorders. They concluded the presentation of sex/gender ratios is not systematic.

"We need to be more conscientious about measuring and analyzing sex and gender variables in our research studies so we can better understand how these disorders develop, and so we can create and implement optimal treatments for everyone," Hartung says.

More information: Cynthia M. Hartung et al. Sex and gender in psychopathology: DSM–5 and beyond., *Psychological Bulletin* (2019). [DOI: 10.1037/bul0000183](https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000183)

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