

## Conclusion

Self-determination has been the best weapon or strategy for disenfranchised individuals and groups to effectively counter the practices of oppression. A notable characteristic of the social psychology of self-determination is the positive group feeling and self-esteem that leads to individual and group success. As demonstrated in the self-determination examples portrayed in this entry, another notable characteristic of this individual and group phenomenon is the establishment of self and group worthiness independent of controlling social, political, and legal means imposed by dominant groups.

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## SENSITIVITY

### Definition

Sensitivity is the level of awareness of one's surroundings *and* the response to the situation. Sensitivity also relates to the speed at which one is aware and responds to his or her surroundings, specifically with people's emotions. True sensitivity requires both components: awareness and response. For example, Peter may be aware that Sarah is crying but chooses to ignore her or disregard her emotions. Without a considerate response to Sarah's situation, Peter cannot partake in sensitivity.

Sensitivity also refers to the level of emotions experienced as a response to others' opinions and behaviors. Individuals with high levels of sensitivity

may tend to personalize comments or actions by other people toward them, even if others did not intend their comments and actions that way. For example, Peter may tell Sarah that she looks tired, and Sarah might perceive that Peter is implying that she is ugly. Because of Sarah's highly sensitive nature, Peter's words are likely to be interpreted negatively even if he didn't mean to imply anything about her looks.

### *Differences with Similar Terms*

Sensitivity may be associated with other similar terms, such as *empathy* and *defensiveness*. Empathy differs from sensitivity in that empathy entails someone sharing in the feelings of another and experiencing what he or she is experiencing. Sensitivity allows someone to be aware of another person's situation and respond to it in a considerate manner, but the individual does not need to share in the emotions of that person. For example, Sarah might share with Peter that she is upset because she lost her favorite necklace. Peter can be sensitive by recognizing that Sarah is sad and perhaps even help her find it, but he is not empathic unless he can feel the level of sadness Sarah is experiencing due to this loss. Sensitivity and defensiveness differ in that sensitivity is associated with the negative feelings as a response, whereas defensiveness refers to the action or behavior as a response. For example, Peter may tell Sarah that she looks tired, and she may think that Peter is saying she is ugly. Sarah's sensitivity may result in her feeling insecure about his comment but not giving a response of any sort. On the contrary, Sarah's defensiveness may cause her to snap back and tell Peter that she looks tired because she was up all night studying and not because she is not an attractive person.

### *Recent Research Syntheses Related to Sensitivity*

**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SENSITIVITY** Studies have shown that females are more sensitive when involving emotions rather than cognitions. An extensive quantitative review (i.e., a meta-analysis) study (Cross, Copping, & Campbell, 2011) found that females are more sensitive when it comes to punishment, which depends on the extent of fear and anxiety rather than dislike or avoidance. This phenomenon is likely due to the fact that females

generally experience emotions more intensely than males. Males have a stronger pursuit of sensitivity pertaining to reward, indicating greater motivation in the pursuit of dominance, specifically in the form of money or status (Cross et al., 2011).

Males are overrepresented in socially problematic behaviors such as aggression and criminal behavior. These behaviors have been linked to impulsivity. However, a meta-analysis study found that males were more specifically related to greater sensation seeking and more risk taking, indicating that they were more attracted to sensation and risk than females (Cross et al., 2011). Stronger gender differences were found in lower-order motivational sensitivity, such as reward sensitivity, punishment sensitivity, sensation seeking, and risk taking than higher-order cognitive control such as effortful and executive forms of behavior control. These differences indicated less gender differences for cognitive control, which involved ability or cognitions rather than emotions (Cross et al., 2011). Therefore, instead of focusing on reducing males' impulsivity for socially problematic behaviors, trying to increase their emotional sensitivity was potentially the most helpful with reducing their lower-order motivational sensitivity.

### *Sensitivity and Intelligence*

Studies have shown that sensitivity is related to intelligence. A meta-analysis study found a positive association between intelligence, specifically in regard to decoding nonverbal cues and interpersonal sensitivity in both adults and children, indicating that intelligent individuals tend to be socially skilled (Murphy & Hall, 2011). Interpersonal sensitivity requires some level of social sophistication in being able to accurately assess a person or situation, and thus, individuals with higher intelligence may be more interpersonally sensitive, better at assessing social situations, and more skilled in social interactions (Murphy & Hall, 2011). The relationship between interpersonal sensitivity and intelligence was even stronger when: 1) judging an emotion than judging the intended meaning of others' behavior; and 2) judging for audio-only information than audio-and-video information (Murphy & Hall, 2011).

### *Sensitivity and Training*

Studies have shown that training can increase sensitivity. Parents' sensitivity is associated with their children's attachment security, and parents' sensitivity is increased with education and training. A meta-analysis study found that higher levels of fathers' sensitivity were associated with more infant–father attachment security (Lucassen et al., 2011). Yet despite recent changes in fathers' role patterns, there were no associations between fathers' sensitivity and infants' attachment in more recent years (Lucassen et al., 2011).

Another meta-analysis study found that interventions designed to increase mothers' sensitivity and their children's attachment security were effective (Bakermans-Kranenburg; Van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003). Further, more successful sensitivity interventions were more effective in enhancing children's attachment security. Given that sensitivity is increased by interventions, prevention or intervention strategies designed to increase fathers' sensitivity may be more effective than interventions focusing on mothers only (Lucassen et al., 2011).

### *Implications*

Although increasing intelligence in general might be difficult, teaching how to decode nonverbal cues can be done to increase interpersonal sensitivity. As research has shown that sensitivity can be increased, educating *all* individuals about sensitivity, not only parents, may be beneficial. Also, educating males about sensitivity, especially emotional sensitivity, could help.

Increasing sensitivity has many benefits. Sensitivity may be the first step to empathy due to the level of awareness that sensitivity requires. Sensitive individuals are able to acknowledge and execute appropriate responses to their surroundings and thus can encourage more respect for other individuals in this way. By taking notice of others' needs, sensitive individuals can advocate for unnoticed individuals and promote more positive behavior in a variety of contexts. By starting with sensitivity, individuals can go further in their interactions by engaging in empathic behaviors such as feeling others' anxiety levels, desiring to help them through a difficult situation, and drawing others to be more sensitive to others' needs.

There are many ways to increase sensitivity. Being aware of cultural differences can increase sensitivity. Sensitivity between cultures is important due to the different meanings of similar behaviors. For example, the middle finger is used as an offensive measure toward another person in the United States; however, the middle finger is used as the primary pointing finger in South Korea because it is the longest finger. Cultural sensitivity requires consideration of other cultures within the same behaviors so that individuals between cultures can coexist as harmoniously as possible. Cultural sensitivity within different behaviors is also necessary in order to portray respect for individuals with different backgrounds. Misunderstandings, conflict, and confusions can be minimized dramatically with a combined effort of cultural sensitivity among all people.

Being intentional about being aware of one's surroundings can also increase sensitivity. For example, walking on a street full of pedestrians could be approached in two ways: first, one could be thinking about his own life, including thoughts pertaining to his schedule, his next meal, and his plan for the next twenty-four hours; second, one could be keenly aware of the several people passing him and notice details such as others' facial expressions, conversation pieces, and directions. Although the first individual could also be aware of the surroundings presented in the second individual's scenario, the second individual is more intentionally aware of his surroundings, and therefore is more sensitive to his surroundings.

Another approach to increasing sensitivity could be by partaking in empathy, specifically in reference to being sensitive to other people. Sensitivity entails two parts: first, noticing others' emotions by facial expressions, tone of voice, verbal cues, and nonverbal cues, and second, deciding to respond to these emotions in an appropriate manner. One could increase sensitivity by making an effort to notice the aforementioned indications of another's experiences rather than being content within one's own mind and emotions.

There is not much research being done on the notion of sensitivity. Research on increasing sensitivity can be beneficial for the public because more people would be more attentive to others' needs. Further research on sensitivity is necessary in the

following contexts, but not limited to: increasing sensitivity of surroundings, increasing multicultural sensitivity, and increasing intentionality behind sensitivity. Sensitivity is an important concept that requires intentionality, skill, and social awareness among individuals. Overall, sensitive cognizance could result in a cyclical effect of beneficence and promote positive behavior within schools, organizations, businesses, and other social contexts.

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### SEXISM

#### *Evade and Retreat: Female Objectification and the Reluctance to “Lean In”*

On January 29, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act (LLFPA), an eponymous mandate signaling triumph toward the equal pay for equal work mantra heard by many. Ironically, the LLFPA did not serve as the nascent legislation for pay equity; instead, it restored prior laws to support pay discrimination claims beyond initial hire dates and allowed workers some flexibility in challenging unfair compensation practices once discriminatory acts associated with pay

inequity are discovered (NWLC, 2013). For context, Lilly Ledbetter served as a supervisor for Goodyear and was unaware of the pay discrepancies between her salary and the salary of her male coworkers due to company policies that discouraged the discussion of pay. Once salary information was revealed, Ledbetter filed a complaint, and a jury awarded her damages over \$3 million. The ruling was eventually reversed, and the Supreme Court upheld the decision by a 5–4 vote (NWLC, 2013). The Supreme Court’s judgment to support the reversal was based on the date of the original infraction: although the initial discriminatory action in pay took place years prior to her claim, Ledbetter was unable to collect compensation and punitive damages because she continued to receive pay, however iniquitous in nature (NWLC, 2013).

In 2009, the median hourly wage of full-time workers for men and women was reported as approximately \$18 and \$15, respectively. In 2012, women earned 84 percent as much as men, lessening the gap of 65 percent reported in 1980 (Pew Research, 2013). Women now account for almost half of today’s labor force and are outpacing men for conferred degrees. However, only 29 percent of adults believe the challenge to promote equity in the workplace has been met (Pew Research, 2013). Factors such as occupational choices, hours worked, and household obligation may impact pay awarded to women (Malmusi, Vives, Benach, & Borrell, 2014; Pew Research, 2013), and in 2013, the world was introduced to yet another rationale for pay inequity: women’s inability to “lean in.” A phrase made popular by American businesswoman Sheryl Sandberg, “lean in” refers to assertiveness within one’s career and taking advantage of opportunities often overlooked due to one’s passive nature (Sandberg, 2013). Sandberg does offer valuable insight while encouraging women to lean in, and she juxtaposed her logic with a noteworthy disclaimer: she acknowledges the resources afforded to her and chose to address the issue of women’s decisiveness through her personal lens. Thus, her insight into a complicated situation depends on minimizing the effects of how society constructs “woman”; in other words, her perspective overlooks the forceful nature of societal norms that prevent the “lean in” experience.

We must now address the following questions to better understand the proficiency by which one can lean in: What happens if the objects hindering women from leaning in are ingrained within the space one may identify as “the norm”? How does one overcome the social and cultural context that often underestimates the impact of viewing women as an object? Finally, if a woman does master the art of leaning in, how does she fight against the gaze often associated with learned reactions from past experiences? This entry will address the objectification of women and common misconceptions associated with minimizing the objectifying gaze. The entry will also offer insight for dismantling objectification to encourage leaning in.

While working at Goodyear, Ledbetter was forced to deal with criminal acts of vandalism—her car was damaged on several occasions—and she feared for her personal safety. She was also the victim of sexual harassment, but she did not publicly speak of her work conditions. Based on an anonymous tip, Ledbetter finally sued Goodyear after working there for nineteen years (Ledbetter & Isom, 2012). If we were to compare Ledbetter’s story to the blueprint for leaning in as described by Sandberg (2013), one could argue that a higher sense of self-confidence may have better served Ledbetter; alternatively, one might identify the imbalance between her likeability and success as an obstacle for receiving equal pay. This rudimentary comparison would erroneously overlook the context Ledbetter was forced to function in—and in some facets, so does Sandberg. Ledbetter faced a system that often objectifies women (evidenced by the harassment and covert action to have her removed from Goodyear). And even when a symbol of this objective gaze (pay discrepancies) has been revealed and conquered (original lawsuit verdict), women are often reminded of the limited power they wield in the system. Case in point: Once Ledbetter won her lawsuit, the Supreme Court was able to uphold the ruling reversal based on the statute of limitations, not the integrity of the case. In other words, because Ledbetter was paid less than her male counterparts, at a company in which employee pay is not fodder for discussion, she could only take action once the infraction was revealed. Unfortunately for Ledbetter, the very item

that reinforced her objectification also served as a barrier for justice.

### *The Objectification of Women*

In order to understand the phenomenon that prevents many women from leaning in, we need to better understand the recognized societal norm. First and foremost, we function in a heterosexual culture, one in which the common custom is that of a male-female dichotomy marked by disproportionate power—a view, of course, that further disadvantages those who do not identify as heterosexual (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Katz, 1996). Power is demonstrated by the ability to overcome resistance displayed by another, expressed through dominance in decision making, the ability to engage in a behavior against a person’s wishes, and the ability to control another’s actions (Emerson, 1990). Those with power are allowed to assign value to attributes assessed through class, sexuality, age, race, and gender. According to the theoretical framework for objectification, this disproportionate power is applied to women’s bodies: in short, a woman’s body parts become disjointed from the person and are viewed as instruments that represent women. A disjointed body becomes objective, and the person’s subjective mind is no longer the distinguishing mark of a functioning being (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The sexual dimension of value is then assigned to women based on the disjointed body.

Gender traditionally refers to a set of collective characteristics, including socially and culturally constructed properties, ascribed to the body. The body is then constructed based upon properties that correlate with value. Sexual objectification occurs during the collective treatment and objectifying gaze of the body. The body is then transformed into an object valued for its use or for consumption by others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gervais, Holland, & Dodd, 2013). The objectifying gaze may occur amid actual or video portrayals of interpersonal and social encounters, and the objectified woman may or may not be present. Women are gazed upon more frequently than men, and the male gaze accompanied by a sexual appraisal of a woman can be distressing (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This gaze is then embedded within our culture and used to dictate the manner in which to observe and