

Psychological differences between women and men are often the largest in gender egalitarian cultures. Why?

Large cross-cultural studies of human psychology—attempts to document our geographically varying ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving around the world—are becoming more common. Also becoming more common are reports from such studies showing something rather unexpected: Psychological differences between women and men are often the [largest](#) in cultures that are the most gender [egalitarian](#).

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To help people understand how evolved sex differences can vary across cultures, perhaps the easiest attribute to consider is the presumably “evolved” sex difference in human height. Although men are generally taller than women ([on average](#)), the degree of this difference is highly culturally variable (and can be very small in some [populations](#)).

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Well, in this case, the cultural variation in sex differences in height likely stems, in part, from harsh [socioecologies](#) reducing the size of the observed sex difference. This is because men’s height appears to be more deleteriously affected by poor [nutrition](#) and disease than is women’s height. As Gaulin and Boster ([1992](#)) noted in their review of sex differences in stature across 155 human societies, “substandard nutrition could cause individuals to fall short of their genetically set growth potential, and, importantly, males seem to be more sensitive to such developmental perturbations than females” (p. 474). This often happens with sexually-selected features, which are, by design, difficult to generate (Geary, [2021](#)), though it’s certainly not the case that men show greater [phenotypic plasticity](#) or [differential susceptibility](#) to all [environmental inputs](#).

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