

So far, we have been assuming that cognitive development proceeds in pretty much the same way for everyone. In the previous chapter, of course, we saw that children often don't approach cognitive tasks in exactly the same way as adults do, but we made the assumption that with time, maturity, and perhaps education they come to do so. In effect, we've been ignoring what psychologists call **individual differences**, stable patterns of performance that differ qualitatively and/or quantitatively across individuals.

In Chapter 15, we will consider differences in cognition as a function of one's culture. Here, we will consider some other sources of individual differences—differences in cognitive abilities, concentrating on intelligence, and differences in cognitive styles of approaching particular tasks. We will also consider

gender differences in cognition: stable differences in cognition or cognitive processing of information that varies as a function of one's biological sex and psychological attitudes associated with one's sex.

Why are cognitive psychologists interested in individual or gender differences in cognition? Simply stated, if people vary systematically in the way they approach cognitive tasks, then psychologists cannot speak of “the” way cognition works. To present only one approach if in fact there are several approaches is to ignore human diversity and to assume that only one way of carrying out a task exists. Researchers interested in individual and gender differences try to explain why some people seem to consistently outperform others on cognitive tasks and why some people feel more comfortable with certain cognitive tasks than with others.