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April 8, 2012

Gender Paradigms

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Societal Constructed Gender Roles

Research Paper

Produced, put into a box, labeled, and categorized. This is what we are. We are becoming nothing but products of what society wants us to be. Since birth we are labeled either “pink” or “blue”. Pink is for girls and blue is for boy. This is where it all began. Gender discrimination starts with colors and grows into becoming a label of which we are identified. Before we know it, we are put into a restricted box constructed by society, and it is up to the individual to either stay within the norms or to defy against societies labels. Women such as Janet Guthrie and men such as Jeremy Abbott are the people who have stood up and broken out of these restricting boxes.

What is a man? “Society and media define a man as someone with stature, wealth, and power. A female on the other hand is nurturing, caring, and motherly” (Smith, 2012, pg 2). These are the qualities most commonly relatable to a man and a woman; however, the definition of a man and a woman in the dictionary had nothing to do with qualities stated or the roles of a male and a female. Rather it talked about chromozomes. This is how it should be. Lindsey defines gender as “Referring to those social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts. Sex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person is born with it, but gender is an achieved status because it must be learned” (Lindsey, 1990, pg 4). A man is different than a woman because a male has an x and y chromosome, and a female has two x chromosomes. From a biological perspective this is the only difference between males and females. When we talk about gender; however, we have to take into account what society deems as masculine or feminine. As Lindsey states “gender is learned” We learn how to act like a boy or a girl. We begin to associate colors, feelings, and actions with gender resulting in socially constructed gender roles.

Throughout history discrimination has existed and been fought against. It is time for gender discrimination and stereotypes to end. The timeline of gender stereotypes begins at birth. We are “deemed pink or blue” along with a name that stereotypically fits our gender. When deciding on a name for children, parents often use a book of boy or girl names. (Nick, 2012, pg 1) Some names are gender neutral; however, others are very much labeled as boy names or girl names. This distinction between boys and girls continues into early childhood especially in the toy industry. “Today, toy stores divide the many toys, games and movies into two primary categories: boy and girl” (Starr, pg 1) Girls play with the princesses and dolls while the boys play with the cars and Legos. In early adolescence boys begin to play video games while girls play house and princess. While boys continue to play video games into their teenage years and beyond, girls begin to focus more on image; putting on makeup and going out shopping with friends. Young girls are expected to be nurturing and gentle while boys are expected to be strong and brave. Boys are the best at sports, as they possess strength and agility. Boys play sports while girls cheer from the sidelines. “Boys are doctors; Girls are Nurses. Boys invent thing; Girls use the things boys invent. Boys fix things; Girls need things fixed. Boys are presidents; Girls are first ladies" (Starr, pg 1). All of these stereotypes limit the full potential of males and females. If a man wants to be a nurse and a woman wants to be a president, so be it. Let them defy these stereotypes and prove to society that gender does not limit our capabilities. Starr states, “Due to the stereotypical activities based on gender that society expects children to abide by through the toys they choose, boys and girls become limited only to their own gender, not allowing them to explore different roles”(Starr, Pg 2). Children should be able to act how they want and play with any toy regardless of the gender which the industry is targeting. The industry of toys as well as society need to stop limiting these children’s full potential. These restraining stereotypes not only exist at home or in daycare, but also in schools.

In the education system stereotypes exist between boys and girls. "Sitting in the same classroom, reading the same textbook, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different educations." (Chapman, pg 1). This is due to the fact that teachers can instigate these gender paradigms. “Teachers socialize girls towards a feminine ideal. Girls are praised for being neat, quiet, and calm, whereas boys are encouraged to think independently, be active and speak up. Girls in grades six and seven rate being popular and well-liked as more important than being perceived as competent or independent. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to rank independence and competence as more important." (Chapman, pg 2) Schooling greatly influences children, as it is a place where they learn skills both mentally and physically. At this age their minds are very moldable, as they have not yet been exposed to everything. Not only do they learn from their parents, but children learn form their peers and from their teachers. Gender stereotyping happens because “classrooms are microcosms of society, mirroring its strengths and ills alike, it follows that the normal socialization patterns of young children that often lead to distorted perceptions of gender roles are reflected in the classrooms”(Chapman, pg 2). What is said in class reflects upon a child’s perception of the world. If genders are not treated the same in class neither will they be in society. Teachers of young children should be very cautious of how they treat both genders. Instead of treating them separately and essentially giving each gender a “different education”, they should strive to be less biased and treat both genders equally. Teachers should also be very careful of the readings and assignments they are giving their students. “Using texts that omit contributions of women, that tokenize the experiences of women, or that stereotype gender roles, further compounds gender bias in schools' curriculum” (Chapman, pg 3). There should be regulations on the text read in classrooms. The books should be as unbiased as possible so that children do not get a skewed sense of genders. In order to stop gender bias in schools, teachers need to be more aware with how they are acting and what they are teaching. Then they need to find strategies for altering their behavior as well as the materials they are teaching. A good idea for this would be to hold seminars for teachers how to be less discriminatory in the work place. “Until educational sexism is eradicated, more than half of our children will be shortchanged and their gifts lost to society” (Chapman, Pg 3). These children are the future, but with the boxed up restrictions and labels society puts on them, some children will never have the opportunity to share their gifts to the world. They will be kept to their own never knowing what it would have been like to defy a stereotype. They will never be able to tell society that their boxes should have never been labeled.

Gender stereotyping carries on from schools and creeps its way into the dating world. In the dating world, men generally ask the women out and pay for her on dates. Guys are meant to open the doors for ladies and drive the woman to the date, walk on the traffic side of the street, pull out the chair for a woman, and much more. If a man fails to do any of these things he is thought of as ungentlemanly or rude. If a woman asks a man out it she is though of as pushy or desperate. The man is always supposed to initiate the relationship or make the moves. These stereotypes placed on men and women in the dating world can be very stressful and binding. From school and social life these stereotypes follow into careers. In the family world the woman is considered the nurturer who stays at home taking care of the children and cooking while the husband goes out to work and earn money to support his family. These are all stereotypes or put upon us since a very early age and it is up to the individual to carry on with these gender roles or defy them. Lindsey defines gender roles as “the expected attitudes and behaviors a society associates with each sex. This definition places gender squarely in the sociocultural context” (Lindsey, 1990, pg 4). We need to go against what is “expected” of our gender in order to eradicate these stereotypes. One man who has gone against the “expected attitudes” of society is Jeremy Abbot.

Jeremy Abbott is a male figure skater who has won the three U.S. championships. He defies the stereotype that men have to play “manly” sports to be seen as strong or powerful. He dances on ice and is proud of his skill, yet he still enjoys sports teams such as the Boston Red Socks. He was the “He was the only man to successfully perform a quad in San Jose, opening his free with a quad toe” (Abbot, pg 1). While in process of reaching his goal to be in the Olympics, he has also shown the world a great example of how to be a man while embracing femininity. A woman who like Abbot, has fought the current is Jane Guthrie.

A famous woman who has defied a stereotype against women is NASCAR driver, Janet Guthrie. She has gone above and beyond in going against the stereotype that women cannot drive. “Janet Guthrie is one of the most accomplished women in all of sports. In 1977 Janet Guthrie broke many records as female race car fans watched her around the world compete as the first woman ever in both the Daytona 500 and Indy 500”(Guthrie, pg 1). This woman is an idol to all the women who strive to defy stereotypes. Not only did she defy the stereotype of women cant drive, but she did it with flying colors. “Janet’s racing accomplishments were far from her only achievements in life as she is also an aerospace engineer, licensed pilot and flight instructor”(Guthrie, pg 1). She went against more of stereotypes put against women and received her pilots license and was an engineer. She also made it possible for other women to become racers. “Attitudes among drivers, however, have shifted over the years, partly because Guthrie's success in breaking the gender barrier has made women racers more acceptable.”(Guthrie, pg 1). This is quite a feat for a woman and she is a perfect example of a successful woman going against the gender roles of society.

I, like Janet Guthrie, enjoy going against the stereotypes put against me. I was cast typed in my acting class as the dumb bimbo trophy wife/ cheerleader, all because of the color of my hair. I had this coming and I knew that’s what people assume when they see bright blonde hair, but I do not mind this stereotype for the fact that I love to prove their labels wrong. I know I am not dumb so it does not bother me, and once people take the time to get to know me, they figure this out. As far as gender goes, I have always been the tomboy type, easily influenced by my brother and his friends. I would join them roller skating, riding bikes, and playing Legos. To this day I continue to defy the stereotypes of women. I play sports that supposedly only guys are good at like snowboarding, long boarding, and playing football. In fact to continue this project, next year I would like to start a powder puff woman’s football club here at Principia College. It would be a great way to defy the stereotype that women cannot play “manly” sports while having fun. Hopefully other women will want to join in my effort to break down a stereotype as well as showing both genders that we are all equal.

While gender stereotypes exist everywhere, there is no excuse for them. These stereotypes are not bettering society, but rather bringing society down with them. This problem needs to be solved at the root: childhood. It stems from one generation and branches off to the generations thereafter. If everyone were more aware about how they treat, act, and talk around children then there would be less of a societal stereotype implanted in children’s heads, stopping the stereotyping with this generation. With the help of everyone, gender stereotyping can stop now.

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