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Behavioral Double Standards

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BEHAVIORAL DOUBLE STANDARDS

Exposing Behavioral Double Standards

What is a double standard? Dictionary.com describes double standard as the treating of one group of people differently than another group when they both do the same thing. Males and females are often treated differently when they exhibit the same behavior. Valenti pointed out how men and women are viewed differently when anger is displayed. Men are taken seriously and women are on the rag (Valenti, 2008).

Valenti provided a very good description of this double standard. She had an argument with her boyfriend and in an effort to invalidate her position; he exclaimed that she was “going soap opera”. She said that this caused her to believe that she was being overly dramatic. In this instance, the boyfriend was to be taken seriously when he became angry and she was not (Valenti, 2008). Even though both parties displayed the same emotion, the female was the one that was not to be taken seriously. Was the male going “soap opera”? Most would not see it that way. He was being assertive. This illustrates the double standard.

There are other situations where anger is interpreted differently by the sexes. Mazzulo presents the following event. A few couples were having dinner at a restaurant. The service and the food were terrible and one of the women complained and demanded that the bill be reduced. The other couples were embarrassed when the female spoke up. Mazzulo asks if they would have reacted the same way if the husband had been the one who had complained (Mazzulo).

Where could this double standard come from? Barkacs and Standifird mention a management study where managers were asked to list eight characteristics of great leaders. The results were interesting. Female managers mentioned recognizing strengths, fairness, appreciation, and accessibility. Male managers included aggressiveness, confidence, and objectivity. The different genders had different results for the same question. Another finding included comments that we have seen in all of the other readings. Females are more empathic and patient. They also concluded that men are seen as more aggressive and women are more cooperative. They mentioned that parents pass their values and beliefs on to their children. The experiences of the parents influence the attitudes of the children. If the parents married at a young age, the children will also be more likely to marry at a young age (Barkacs & Standifird, 2008). From the examples above, we can see that males and females see things differently and act differently. They have also learned many things from the parents. Society has a certain expectation for the behavior of each gender. These expectations can be taught to the children through various methods and can be passed on to the next generation.

Let us talk about those expectations for a moment. Sandler comments that we all have expectations for the behavior of the opposite sex. When people do not act according to those expectations, we get uncomfortable. He pointed out that men are expected to act assertive, females are to be passive, and we are uncomfortable when they act out differently. One response to the aggressive female is to call her a “bitch” (Sandler, 2005). These expectations keep the behavior alive. It is also very effective. Women seem to be accepting the response because they act the same way when another female does it. Women are applying this standard to other females. The behavior does not meet their expectations of society.

Men have always been in a position of power in society. This could explain some of the double standard. Men control many aspects of the female’s lives. Life is very difficult for most females who do not conform. There is much to lose. Men are the major money earners, run the companies, and lead nations. When in the position of power, the one in power gets to make the rules. Many men want to continue to have that position of power and will do anything to keep it. Stifling the voice of the women helps to accomplish this.

Another reason for this double standard is the different physiological makeup of the genders. We view the world differently. Women are more empathetic and males are more systemizing. Males are the aggressors. Women have traits that make them more patient and better listeners. (Baron-Cohen, 2003) These behaviors (double standards) are passed on to our children when they see the interaction between the sexes in the family and how they are acted out in the media.

What is the impact on society? Double standards can be dangerous. Valenti believes that women will not express their anger outwardly. Holding the anger inside can cause many medical issues (Valenti, 2008). Many talented females have changed promising career paths or have just quit trying to move ahead. Women have been silenced when their opinion could have brought about a different outcome. Women see things from a different perspective. It is important for them to speak up because the best decisions are made when all points of view are taken into consideration. Why speak up if you feel strongly about something and know that you are not going to be taken seriously? The self-esteem of many women has been damaged because they may not see themselves or their opinions as valued. In China, girls are not valued as highly as boys are. As a result, many girls are aborted due to the government policy of one child per family. Granted this is extreme and is not necessarily due to double standards. There are many economic reasons. However, this could lead society down that path.

How can this be changed? This will be difficult since most men and women both view aggressive females in the same way. When a woman spoke up to complain about bad food and service in the restaurant, both the males and the females were embarrassed. Both genders are stifling this behavior. Societies view on the “angry” female has to change. Society needs to be reprogrammed. This has to occur in schools, in the media, and at home. All three share the responsibility to make this happen. Will men give up their power? Are men willing to share? Women will really have to take the lead on this. Women need to encourage other women speak out and resist the acceptance of this type of behavior from other women and men. Both genders need to be called out on this behavior when it happens. Maybe then, the men can be more accepting. As women move up into positions of power, this will help shift attitudes.

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Author Note

Being a male, I learned a lot by studying this topic. My wife has to deal with this every day as a member of the work force. Her management group is male. It is also a topic that congers up a lot of emotion for her. She first noticed this while a drum major in the high school band. Now, after studying this topic, I can be more aware of this dynamic in my conversations with other females. Men need to react differently to treat everyone the same.