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**COMM 202 (2185)**

**A) How does media create meanings about gender?**

People learn a lot about society from the media they consume, especially children whose minds are still forming and absorbing information. When media portrays men and women as acting in specific roles, the audience tends to attribute those behaviors as part of what’s to be expected of the respective genders.

**B) Provide examples of how this is manifested in our everyday lives.**

The expectation brought on by media is that men are to be tough. When men see actions movies, they interpret masculinity as being strong, brave, aggressive, and dominant. On the flip side, women who watch romantic comedies interpret femininity as being beautiful, charming, passive, and emotional.

**C) Provide a link to a commercial/ad that stereotypes gender. Even though it is natural to find humor in some of these portrayals, in what ways is this problematic.**

A typical gender stereotype assigned to women is that one of their core functions is to do tedious housework such as washing dishes, doing laundry, cooking, and cleaning the house. Below is a link to a Swiffer ad that portrays a woman cleaning her home.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lCFreZ6dxc>

While the ad does have good intentions, it does play to the stereotype that a woman’s role in the household is to clean. Most advertisements for cleaning supplies show women cleaning the home, not men. This is probably reflective of reality, thus advertisers are trying to appeal to women who use their products as opposed to men. However, in the end it only serves to entrench the already existing stereotype.

**Questions D through H reference the list below:**

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| --- | --- |
| **Masculinity** | **Femininity** |
| * strength * dominance * aggression * independence * empowerment * active * rational thought * production * breadwinner * subject * outdoors * technology | * weakness * submission * compliance/vulnerability * dependence * disempowerment * passive * emotion * consumption * nurturer * object * indoors * nature |

**D) How is the list being currently challenged?**

Society has made a lot of changes over the last century. In that time, women have been granted the right to vote and work as they so choose. As a consequence of that, attitudes towards gender roles and what attributes are attached to them have changed. For instance, women who have their own carriers can no longer been seen as “dependent”, “disempowered”, or solely “consumers”. There are now more women attending college then men and that disparity is growing. According to BBC News, if the trend continues, girls born in 2016 will be 75% more likely to go to college than their male counterparts. So, the idea of femininity being “emotional” as opposed to “rational” no longer applies.

As for men, some of the more traditional masculine traits are becoming less relative. Since women are working and going to college in greater numbers, men can no longer be seen as the sole “breadwinners”, “producers’, or “rational thinkers”.

**E) What traits do you have that are typically considered “on the list” of the other sex?**

I, as a man, identify with the so-called “feminine” traits of: emotion, consumption, nurturer, and nature. I don’t believe in bottling-up my emotions and instead I prefer to express how I’m feeling when appropriate. I, like everyone else in modern society, am a consumer of goods. I enjoy luxurious things and design my apartments with nice furnishings and appliances. I do not have any children, but I do have a dog that I absolutely adore. I love doting on him and taking care of him since I know that love is reciprocal. I also love nature. I prefer foods that are natural or organic and believe in taking care of the environment. I also enjoy going on scenic walks and observing nature in all of its beauty.

**F) What examples do you see in your daily life of people challenging the historic list?**

I serve in the United States military, which has historically been a male dominated profession. It still is to an extent, but more and more women are enlisting and serving beside men. So, it’s erroneous to claim that these women are “weak”, “submissive”, or “disempowered”, or “passive”. With the exception of Special Forces, women do these jobs just as well as their males counterparts without any problem.

**G) What about examples in media of characters or people challenging the list?**

Movies, TV shows, and videogames with strong fictional female protagonists such as Wonder Woman, Tomb Raider, The Last of Us, Game of Thrones, and New Girl, are helping to erase the perception of women as “weak”, “submissive”, “disempowered”, and “passive”. In reality, women like Ronda Rousey, Chelsea Handler, and Elizabeth Warren are doing the same.

**H) Finally, do you agree or disagree that gender is socially constructed? Provide evidence that backs your opinion.**

While I do agree that certain attributes attached to gender are socially constructed, I do not believe that gender is as a whole. Gender is very much attached to its respective sex. There is a reason, other than societal, that men tend to pursue “masculine” activities and women “feminine” activities. This is because men and women are biologically different and exhibit different characteristics.

This difference in characteristics between sexes is what’s known as “sexual dimorphism” (Matchett 2010). Species across all groups in the animal kingdom exhibit sexual dimorphism. For instance, male birds tend to be the ones with colorful feathers and elaborate songs, which they use to attract females. All mosquitoes that bite are females, since they need the warm blood to nourish their eggs. Male deer have antlers to attract females and to fend off other males. Female spiders are normally much larger than males and will eat them before or after sexual intercourse to nourish their hundreds of eggs. In regards to humans, men are typically taller and stronger than women which our ancestors probably used to fend off other mates. Women have wider hips and breasts to produce and nurture children.

These physical and biological differences lead distinct behaviors. Men with their more muscular bodies, tend to be more aggressive and assertive. Women with their wombs and breasts are designed to be more nurturing. The fact is that men and women behave differently because of the biological differences between them.

**References**

Richardson, H. (2016, August 18). Why do more women than men go to university? Retrieved July 1, 2018, from https://www.bbc.com/news/education-37107208

Matchett, N. J. (2010). Sexual dimorphism and the value of feminist bioethics. *American Journal of Bioethics,* jul2010, 18-20. http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.umuc.edu/10.1080/15265161.2010.485673