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Communication/ Gender/ Identity

What Gender Means for Me:

Growing up gender was always a strange idea to me that was constantly changing without any realization as I got older and “wiser”. When I would bring new friends over to my house I would tell people “my mom is really nice, she just has a boy haircut”. I was embarrassed and confused why my mom did not have hair like all the other moms, but why? The social impact of other people urging others to conform to gender “norms” starts from the very beginning of your existence. Even before you are born you are pushed into an area of black or white, in this case, girl or boy. Through this process you develop a “gender identity”, “a personal perception of one’s sex,” (Wood, 2015, pg. 20). My mom was not a “girly girl”, and she had raised me in a way that I was constantly torn feeling like my mom was “uncool or weird” compared to the other kids’ moms.

I always wondered why I loved pink, dolls, and makeup naturally, but my mom did not. She encouraged me to play sports, take the same “GAP” sweatshirt to school every day, and didn’t even own a tube of mascara. Psychodynamic theories were already at play in my young self as I questioned everything about my mothers’ gender. It was through experiences where I learned that girls could do anything they wanted, and so could boys. Gender was never spoken about with my parents, we just were who we were. Dad read to teach Sunday school and watered the plants, while mom mowed the lawn and drove me to swimming practice. Looking back now our family was an equal gendered home who all supported each other. Middle and high school were years of self-discovery as I tried on the role of many different styles, sexual orientations, and religious beliefs. All factors played a role in the gender I performed for others. Moving through phases of change and difference allowed for me to explore what the meaning of “being a girl was”. Knowing how to do my hair, dress myself, and be socially out-going was the main idea of the ideal feminine girl at my schools, and that’s who I strived to be to fit in.

Twenty-two and realizing I am not even close to being done changing, learning, and growing through my gender performance can seem over whelming or scary at first glance. Performing my gender role currently has transformed into a more individual idea, as I focus on my happiness rather than what others may think about me. Currently I identity as a girl, and I will probably remain that way as I have found happiness in this identity. I have a range of hobbies, (going to the shooting range, working on trucks, can out drink all the boys) that may be seem masculine to others, but I understand from our studies that these things do not make me less of a woman. In fact, they make me into the woman I want to be, right now. Another thing I have realized through my masculine hobbies is that life is always changing. I could wake up tomorrow and hate all those things, start something completely unalike, and identify myself in a different way; that’s O.K. too. I believe my view of gender has also formed with the help of people I have dated. Ranging from girls, to guys with long hair in bands, to “get back in the kitchen” rednecks, their varying views of gender have slowly impacted what I have to say and think about gender roles. The use of their specific language and ideas allows for my own self-reflection, (Wood, 2015, pg. 108).

As I step into the world of my hopeful career of visual fashion merchandising, it is important to remember that “verbal communication expresses cultural view of gender,” (Wood, 2015, pg. 102). Although merchandising is seemingly more visual rather than verbal, it proves to be a very imperative form of communication between companies and brands to their hopeful clientele. Merchandisers are given the responsibility to display stores in the most effective and money driving way for the brand, while keeping the wants of the customers incorporated. When they put certain products on the male side versus the women’s side they are helping affirm what products are “male” and what products are “female”. Merchandisers are the ones who are setting up these standards in the retail world so when will someone change these ways? Do they need to be changed? I think that this class has opened my eye to the potential dangers of using gender negatively in the world of merchandising and retail. Big companies have seemed to make little changes to the way stores are merchandising to be more gender fluid, keeping us in our girl or boy boxes. I hope to use my knowledge and creativity to find a way to successfully make stores more equal while still driving sales and making target goals for the company. Gender proves to be ever changing, growing, and expanding; I think we as a society need to be following right along with it.