

Vivian Bui

Santo Romano

CART 211

5 November 2020

Gender Norms

Gender differentiates the sexes and other identities. It describes the characteristics observed in most women and men. Common traits found in different genders are not limited to biological or physical features, it may also refer to personality traits. Characteristics and behaviors that are expected and standardized based on a person's perceived sex create gender norms and stereotypes. Expectations can be negative or positive, but once imposed can be quite oppressive and detrimental to the individual. This essay aims to examine gender norms and their effect on individuals.

It is difficult to completely discard the long-standing image surrounding genders which created gender norms. As society evolves and attempts to stay away from old stereotypes, both sexes still somewhat portray themselves and hold expectations for their counterpart through traditional views about gender behavior. Gendered behavior is a social construct enforced by society to shape distinctive behaviors for men and women (Bellack and Hersen). While some traits are argued to be biological, some others are heavily influenced by our surroundings. From a young age, our behavior is determined by others' expectations of us solely based on our being male or female (Bellack and Hersen). Young boys and girls learn about gender stereotypes from their immediate environment and the media, and they adapt to behave in gender-appropriate ways (Hentschel et al.). From the start, one expects others' behavior to equally conform to the

social norms of their respective gender. While acting the opposite of one's gender conceptions tend to be strongly discouraged (Bellack and Hersen), we try to conform to the norms to feel accepted, or else we defy the stereotypes and face the judgments. For example, boys receive praise for acting tough but are teased and looked down upon when they act sissy. Boys can act rashly and get into fights and get away with the famous saying "Boys will be boys." Girls are expected to act nice and innocent but are harshly judged and criticized for acting aggressively and letting out their anger as it is deemed unladylike and too violent. However, boys cannot freely show vulnerability like girls do, because that makes them look powerless and "like a girl". Such a thought also affects girls' mentality as they could interpret being "feminine" as an inferior and bad trait. These statements and examples prove that certain characteristics are expected from both sexes and society criticize the ones who do not conform to the masculine or feminine ideology.

One's commitment or defiance to gender roles in a society affects their lives. As some learn to not adhere to the stereotypes, others choose to follow and embrace it. There are no wrong sides per se, but society often favors the expected and desirable option over the strange and supposedly devious option. Many gender behaviors are not inherently bad, but the simple idea of stereotyping genders leads to faulty assessments of people (Hentschel et al.) and some form of discrimination because of one's sex. For example, "women professionals and managers are subject to negative stereotyped attitudes that portray women as doing a poor job fitting into the masculine work world" (Greenglass). People prefer and are accustomed to seeing a male figure in power compared to a woman with a strong personality as she seems out of place in both character and status. Instead, women are not seen as leaders as they are expected to be busy in

subsuming their ambitions and career for the family good (“Asian-American”). Following or defying gender norms is not always a negative thing, but the result depends on how society accepts it, which is not always fair.

Expectations of people based on traditional gender behaviors should not be heavily ingrained into our minds at a young age to become norms and rules, especially if it concerns an aspect that is out of our control such as our biological gender. Gender norms limit and discriminate against a person’s personality. To step away from gender norms and rules means to stop establishing norms on children and grown-ups so our expectations and understanding are not solely based on a person’s sex but the person’s character.

Works Cited

“Asian-American Women Struggling To Move Past Cultural Expectations.” *The New York Times*,

The New York Times, 23 Jan. 1994, www.nytimes.com/1994/01/23/us/asian-american-women-struggling-to-move-past-cultural-expectations.html.

Bellack, Alan S., and Michel Hersen. “Comprehensive Clinical Psychology (1998 Edition).”

Open Library, Pergamon, 1 Jan. 1998,
openlibrary.org/books/OL701708M/Comprehensive_clinical_psychology.

Greenglass, E.R. “Gender Role Stress and Health.” *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Pergamon, 2 Nov. 2002,

www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B0080430767038626.

Hentschel, Tanja, et al. *The Multiple Dimensions of Gender Stereotypes: A Current Look at*

Men's and Women's Characterizations of Others and Themselves. 4 Jan. 2019,
www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00011/full.

