

Course: Media Use and Effects

Course Completed: Spring 2013

Assignment Title: Distorted Perception: The Impact of Media on Formation of Gender Roles in Contemporary Society

Assignment Project Description: The objective in this assignment was to select an area of or research in media and analyze the measurable effects it produces on society.

Reflection: I selected this paper because people form their actions based on their perceptions of gender. Stereotypes factor heavily to the beliefs one has and effects the way that an individual acts both positively and negatively. In organizational environments, the behaviors of an individual are frequently confined to the narrowly defined gender roles that society has conceptualized. These gender roles can inhibit the functioning and effectiveness of an individual in the organization or the organization as a whole.



Distorted Perception:

The Impact of Media on Formation of Gender Roles in Contemporary Society

Erica L. Torre

Kent State University

The media's importance in our society is rapidly growing and, as a result, is becoming a more powerful force in shaping our identities. Gender depiction in contemporary media is portrayed in a highly stereotypical manner. Consequently, these stereotypes are being internalized by individuals and reflected in the real world. Media gender characterizations cast each sex with unattainable and artificial standards in both physical and emotional domains. As gender distortion continues and pervades our societal structure, it disrupts and alters the perception of power and value between sexes. This adversely affects young children and adolescents by assigning an inaccurate definition of what is masculine and what is feminine. The different facets of television and online media environments that these groups frequently use and are most dependent upon, inevitably have a substantial influence on overall gender perception and behavior.

Media's interactivity has advanced dramatically with the aid of technology over the recent years. These multimedia forms have become entwined in the lifestyles of younger generations who grew up around these technologies. According to Ringrose (2011), "In debates on young people's engagements with new media, social networking sites have been explored as potentially democratizing spaces allowing a wider spectrum of young users to engage with digital technology than ever before" (p. 121).

In 2012, an exploratory panel used a collection of three hundred Facebook profile pictures and associated gender traits and pictorial features to assess gender stereotypes present in Facebook images (Rose, Mackey-Kallis, Shyles, Barry, Biagini, Hart, & Jack, 2012). From this

study, they found the profile pictures that were self-selected displayed different characteristics in regards to self-presentation.

Prior research findings in 1990 by Williams and Best, suggested that the traits *active*, *independent*, and *dominant* were usually more prominent with males, while *attractive*, *dependent*, *sentimental*, *sexy*, and *submissive* were generally more evident with females (Rose, Mackey-Kallis, Shyles, Barry, Biagini, Hart, & Jack, 2012). The study found and supported that Facebook profile pictures associated with males would rate higher for the traits *active*, *dominant*, and *independent*. This study also demonstrated that Facebook profile pictures associated with females would rate higher for the traits *attractive* and *dependent*. The researchers found that *sentimentality* was actually a trait that males averaged higher in than when compared to females. The findings also did not support that females would rate higher for the trait of *submissive* and *sexy* compared to males. This analysis also found that it should be expected that women, more than men, would be sexually expressive in their social network profiles because they perceive sexuality as a means of status in society (Rose, Mackey-Kallis, Shyles, Barry, Biagini, Hart, & Jack, 2012).

Due to the heightened level of interactivity between young children, preteens and teens on these social networking sites, the more prone they are to base reality off of the stereotypes they have observed. The delineation between reality and online perception has become distorted for these generations; and they have begun to perceive these online networks as an authentic extension of themselves. As young girls and boys are exposed to media, the depiction of what is masculine and feminine is more likely to guide developmental behavior as the definitive ideal for

their gender and those individuals begin to replicate such behaviors (Rose, Mackey-Kallis, Shyles, Barry, Biagini, Hart, & Jack, 2012). Researchers have found that higher levels of media usage and engagement increased the amount of traditional masculine ideology found in men (Chu, Porche, & Tolman, 2005). Behm-Morawitz and Mastro stated, “Research examining the effects of media exposure demonstrates that media consumption has a measurable influence on people's perceptions of the real world, and, regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions, they are used to help guide subsequent attitudes, judgments, and actions.”

Television is another extension of multimedia that children, preteens, and teens frequently consume. Programming and movie content in this popular form of entertainment also corrupts understanding of gender identity and provides images which models behavior and sets attitudes. Researchers conducted one study which examined the television viewing habits and sexual activity over a one-year period in adolescents ages twelve to seventeen (Callister, Stern, Coyne, Robinson, & Bennion, 2011). The results showed that those who viewed more sexually explicit programming at the beginning of the study were more likely to engage in intercourse and other sexual activities throughout the study. The research in this study calculated that 28% of the 90 movies they used contained adult sexual activity, and 80% showed teen sexual activity (Callister, Stern, Coyne, Robinson, & Bennion, 2011).

A research study attempted to uncover gender scripts by means of analyzing two popular teen series, *Gossip Girl* and *One Tree Hill*. In *One Tree Hill*, the female characters were shown as “sidekicks” or passive to male characters, who took on active roles (Van Damme, 2010). In *Gossip Girl*, the same active/passive roles were embedded in the storyline by incorporating

recurring incidents of helplessness, where dependent girls were saved by strong and heroic boys (Van Damme, 2010). This series also reinforced the traditional ideology that a woman is reliant upon her husband and family. This subservience is the full extent of her existence (Van Damme, 2010). These shows depict an emotional model for girls when coping with life events. Girls were pictured crying over traumatic incidences while males were pictured as dealing with them in more of a taciturn manner (Van Damme, 2010). This research continued to show that in these popular series, females were valued and emphasized for their desirable physical appearance rather than intelligence or other qualities and traits that were not considered part of being feminine (Van Damme, 2010).

Media has become an intricate and dominating force in our society that sets the standard for gender roles and finds younger generations becoming increasingly connected and dependent. These media forms provide a visual mechanism for children to associate their behaviors, interactions, and lifestyles; and they are contributing to a false sense and perception of masculinity and femininity, especially at a time when these individuals are impressionable and vulnerable. Online sites and television shows are creating and defining gender flawed identities for males and females; subsequently, this effects the behaviors and actions of these children because it forces them to believe they need to replicate these standards.

These effects produce devastating results. If an individual does not fit such altered and fabricated standards of gender, negative peer reception and poor self-image is to be expected. The content created in these media forms are manipulating reality, and negatively transforming our culture.

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