

Running head: Sex/Gender Differences in the Popular Media

A Topic of Discussion:

Sex/Gender Differences in the Popular Media

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Stereotypical images of women and men are conveyed continually through popular media, sending us messages of what people are *supposed* to be like. These messages encompass behaviors, personality features, intelligence, occupations, and physical attributes. The ongoing primary message of the media is that men are the norm. Sex/gender differences in employment conditions, ways of thinking, brain structure, societal positions and behavior are commonly revealed through the press.

In the August 2006 issue of Inc. Magazine, a report on how to make great hires in the workplace highlights a systematic approach to evaluating job candidates. Opposed to the typical job interview, this science-based approach is recommended to provide employers with a comprehensive, more balanced, and open-minded view of candidates. Typical interviews produce biased and limited analyses of job applicants. In these situations, interviewers often discuss topics relative to his or her interests. It is suggested that subject matters irrelevant to the desired job qualifications are most often addressed, and tend to focus around personal hobbies of the interviewer and physical attributes of the candidates. The author of the article explains, “He could dismiss the candidate before she’s even started speaking because she’s overweight or overdressed, or he could lose focus because he’s having a rotten day” (Clifford, 2006). Overall, it is common that the interviewer will judge candidates on fewer criteria than intended, and that prejudices involving race and gender impede on the decision-making process of hiring.

Growing in credibility, the three-part structured interview supposedly has potential to make the hiring process as impartial, unbiased, and standardized as possible. First, a behavioral interview is conducted in which a group of interviewers identify the qualities needed for a job. The same questions are asked of each candidate, and the interviewers take notes throughout the consultation. They encourage prospective employees to explain how they have demonstrated those particular qualities in previous work experiences. The author suggests that the behavioral interviewing process is beneficial to hiring practices because it is based on facts, not on feelings. The interview is followed by two types of employment tests that assess cognitive abilities and personality traits.

Cognitive tests are distributed in part because they measure intellectual aptitude. These examinations are filled with SAT-like verbal and mathematical questions. In addition, personality tests are administered and allow direct comparison to the top performers in a specific line of work. The inquiries entail preferential questions and biographical questions. The final phase of the new structured interview focuses on performance. Candidates are asked to give a demonstration of tasks equivalent to one's that would be performed on the job.

The conclusions reached in the article urge employers to evaluate to the fullest extent each individual applicant by using modern, more reliable, and more informative interviewing methods. When comparing these methods to current information provided by the text, it was easy to correlate the concept of "sex-of-experimenter effects" with the interviewing process. The same basic assumptions apply, only in a business setting: whether the interviewer is male or female may influence the outcome of the meeting simply because people react differently to men and women. "It has been found, for instance, that female participants are more likely than males to comply with the demand characteristics of an experimental situation" (Lips, 2005). This implies that women are more likely to act and respond as they think the interviewer wants them to. In the proposed structured interview, the interviewee is evaluated by an entire group of examiners, not just a single male or female examiner. This may eliminate the self-fulfilling prophecies that are held by the candidates, since it would be more difficult to try and act as *every* interviewer wanted them to. Unable to find a way to meet the behavior expectations of all, the prospect will behave naturally and speak truthfully, which are the "facts", not "feelings", that the employers want to observe. It is also easy to assume that since the social environment reinforces or discourages gender differences in behavior, the influence of role expectations and status depends on the interview situation.

The disagreement between the aforementioned article and the class material lies within the realm of testing abilities of women and men. As mentioned earlier, the structured interview values informational data produced by both cognitive and personality tests. In this piece the author provides

evidence that there are in fact differences in male and female cognitive abilities. These dissimilarities are believed to be biologically and culturally based, and also develop as a result of socialization. These differences emphasize the diverse skills of men and women, and the gender gap is especially noticeable in quantitative performance. “In fact, boys score significantly higher than girls on both the verbal and math subtests of the SAT, and they have done so throughout most of the exam’s history, although boys’ average score advantage is much greater on the math than the verbal section” (Mead, 2006). So, why would the world’s leading companies, in route to find the world’s top employees, utilize employment tests that use SAT-like verbal and mathematical questions, when there is evidence proving a gender gap in cognitive ability? The “benefits” of the interview testing phenomenon are really not benefits at all; instead, the testing criterion of choice is gender, which is biased within itself. There is already a difference present between the male and female candidates. Sure, the results of the exams will produce quantitative facts, but these facts readily identify gender based differences between female and male applicants. Furthermore, males are advantaged in the standardized testing situation. Women applicants who are intimidated by the testing situation are likely to perform poorly on the exams may in reality be the most qualified for the job. Employers who tend to base their decisions on testing outcomes should keep in mind that cognitive abilities can be increased through training (Lips, 2005) and that both men and women benefit equally from direct career preparation and experience.

This article assumed that both females and males will benefit from a more structured interview. Obviously, it overlooked scientific evidence highlighting major gender gaps in ability through examinations and the expectations of the interview situation. This magazine editorial relied on little empirical evidence supporting the positive effects of structured interviews. Of the support provided, it was *suggested* that behavioral interviewing methods have tripled the correlation of conventional interviews with job success, but no concrete data was verifiable. From a personal standpoint, I feel that the proposed methods for conducting a successful interview are more non-

reliable than dependable. The behavioral interviewing is indeed based on facts; however, women are more likely to behave in ways to please the interviewer rather than behaving in a natural, confident manner. The employment tests are prejudiced in themselves since women and men perform differently; thus exams probably will not be accurate predictors of job-related success.

Another article that suggests sex/gender differences examines the possibility that women feel pain more intensely than men. The suggestions that there are gender based and physical differences in pain perception are in agreement with evidence supported by course texts. The health article asserts that females have more nerve fibers in certain areas of their face, which leads to the fact that women have, at least in some locations on the body, more sensation than men. Lips (2005) supports this notion in claiming that “females are more sensitive to touch in the fingers and hands than males are, as well as more sensitive to pressure on various parts of the body.” The idea that women feel pain more intensely than men is also represented in light of the menstrual cycle. There is evidence suggesting that there is increased sensitivity or responsiveness to pain in the middle of the cycle and reduced sensitivity around menstruation. Furthermore, pain thresholds seem to be lesser in the premenstrual phase. Variations in the activity levels of the nervous system may accompany the cyclic changes of the menstrual cycle, thus making women more susceptible to pain during (and because of) this biologically based event.

The article also suggests that the ways in which sexes experience pain is also affected by life and cultural experiences. The life of an Olympic athlete or a military soldier is very structured and controlled. Strenuous, physical training involves not only preparing your body for optimal endurance and performance, but also preparing your mind. People who train physically also train mentally to experience pain to a lesser degree. The phrase “no pain, no gain” clearly illustrates the fact that in order to succeed and thrive, one must effectively overcome and conquer even the most intense levels of pain. Certainly, the environment in which a person is reared has an effect on how men and women experience and react to pain. In patriarchal societies where men are dominant, it is likely that males

are taught at an early age to suppress their feelings regarding pain. They are more often than women told to “tough it out” and deal personally and privately with pain. In many cultures it is socially acceptable (and normal) for women to cry when they are in pain, thus publicizing their perception of pain. The article questions whether or not women simply verbalize their feelings and perceptions regarding pain more openly than men. Going back to information presented through class discussions and texts, women undoubtedly are more vocal when it comes to proclaiming emotions and feelings, so it is very likely that women do vocalize their pain more frequently and candidly than men.

As a whole, the inferences made in the article concur with information and conclusions presented by relevant course material. The bases for these agreements are rooted in biological and social elements, and focus on perceived acceptability to express certain feelings, whether they be physical or emotional. Assumptions regarding the biological differences between women and men are made, and theoretically, these assumptions prove correct. Women do in fact perceive pain differently than men as a result of unique genetic distinctions. The chosen article relies on empirical evidence that is valuable to the support of biological explanations for pain perceptions in women and men. However, the other causes of consideration, which include cultural influences and life experiences, lack investigational support. My views are in conjunction with the information provided and also with relevant text materials; future research should, however, pay more attention to social and emotional factors when examining gender related differences in pain sensitivity.

A third article presented by the popular media, which is also positively correlated with class material, depicts women outside the boundaries of female norms. In a special report presented in a trendy women’s magazine, the traditional roles and behaviors of women are pushed aside, revealing a side of femininity that is often frowned upon. This assertive aspect of femaleness is driven by inborn nature/nurture tendencies of these women. “Women traditionally focus on their children’s welfare and their long term future, while men are more concerned with putting food on the table.

These women are bound together not by religion or ideology but by a feeling that the people and place they love are being destroyed” (Goodell, 2006). Nurturance, by definition, involves “caring for and promoting the welfare of others” (Lips, 2005) and participation rates may reflect social anxieties and situations. This particular article highlights women’s behaviors as deviating from the female norms represented in relevant course related material. The women in this article went above and beyond the normal levels of nurturance, empathy, and altruism because there are evidently different priorities of men and women in this geographical location of Appalachia. Evolving from their hypersensitive nurturing tendency are anger and aggression, two male normative qualities. The textbook demonstrates the idea that women participate in forms of relational aggression that threatens another person by damaging his or her relationships. The women in this article actively involve themselves in this type of aggressive behavior as they battle the gigantic coal manufacturing business. As visible through their involvement in protests, petitions, and rallies at town meetings and colleges, these women are fighting a difficult and emotional battle to exploit the dangers of the mining industry. By spreading negative information, they are intentionally hurting the images of a particular male-dominated group. “Women have as much potential as men do to be aggressive – under the right conditions” (Lips, 2005). The females active in this fight overcome the social limitations in the expression of their aggression. Even though it is widely socially unacceptable for females to openly display aggressive behavior, they are determined to protect the welfare of their families and communities against the great industrial machine at any cost.

One distinct difference between the text material and this article lies in the bases of power. Lips (2005) suggests that in regards to the social context of power, *males* are more likely to recognize the acceptable conditions in which to express aggression while also assuming they have the entitlement to get their way through aggressive behaviors. In Appalachia, however, the women have sufficient reasoning and justification for their participation in anger and aggression. They refuse to submit to the coal industry, and thus refuse to relinquish everything they love without a

hard fight. The situational factors present are logical reasons for females to be actively involved in verbal and/or physical aggression and also in asserting leadership and power. Yet another discrepancy between information provided by the text and information provided in the article lies in the facet of influenceability. Course materials (Lips, 2005) suggest that females are easier persuaded and influenced in face-to-face encounters or arguments. Contrary to this assumption, the women described in the article did not regress in the face of group pressure of the miners. Instead, they pushed even harder and armed themselves with courage, dedication, and moral clarity. As one nonconforming woman put it, “You gotta look ‘em in the eye...If you show them any fear, they’ll crush you” (Goodell, 2006). Clearly, this article was not based on strict, conclusive empirical evidence. Rather, it demonstrated the gender related behaviors of aggression, power, and influenceability via a real life experience, which is sufficient enough in examining the situational factors that deem non-normative behaviors of women acceptable.

Stereotyped representations of our social world in the media send many clear and sharp messages of how men and women are supposed to relate, react, and submit to one another. In the first article presented, suggestions on making the hiring processes in employment more reliable and successful entail employing tasks, such as taking exams and performing, that are in themselves sex/gender discriminatory. The second article introduced biological, cultural, and social reasoning behind pain perception and responsiveness differences in males and females. The final article walked us through a real situation that actually provoked male-normative behaviors in females. In our society today, every form of popular media presents assumptions about women, men, sex, and gender. Focused attention is given to sex/gender differences in many aspects of our daily lives in order to draw a thick black line between males and females. Hopefully this barrier dividing the genders will diminish as more information and research outcomes are revealed to minimize the ever so popular “gap” that supports oppression in a patriarchal society.

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