

My Gender Analysis

I grew up in a two parent household with both parents working, although my father is essentially viewed as the “bread winner”. The way my parents viewed gender is very Biological deterministic, meaning they believed my sex (parts) determined my gender (Gender in Communication pg 36), in that because I am a boy, I was meant to act tough, fight when being disrespected, play sports more often than tag or hide and seek, and so on. My sister on the other hand is treated differently. Because of her sex she is expected to play with doll houses, use very “girly” accessories, and not to fight. These feminine qualities were heavily reinforced by my mother especially who has a very definitive view of male and female. There is a lot of machismo in the African American culture. As a child I was always told to “man up” and that one day I am going to be the man of the house. My father would always reinforce the notion that I will grow up to take care of my own family and I would have to be the bread winner. He never explicitly told me himself, but I could tell that in his eyes homosexuality does not apply to those roles that he reinforces on me. Even with all of these reinforcements, I still tried to develop my own idea on what it makes me me.

Even though I consider myself a male, I constantly wonder on what it would be like to become a female. To be honest, I am a bit envious of women. Often it's that I am jealous of their beauty and wish I could be just as “beautiful”. But whenever I have thoughts like that I feel a sense of guilt; as if a part of me is saying “Guys are not meant to be beautiful.” This would most likely be the polar opposite of Penis envy, or the supposed envy of the male's possession of a penis. My unconscious thoughts of me wanting to be a female struggles with my upbringing and the idea of what a man should really act like. But there is one instance where I fully accept the “feminine” role. Most homosexual relationships or pairings are viewed as having one

“masculine” partner and one “feminine” partner. This would fall under the Psychoanalysis theory meaning my unconscious thoughts and memories influence my actions and beliefs (Gender in Communication pg 36). It wasn’t until I was 15 years old that I began to encounter more gay men around my age as well as more accepting people that I was able to express my feminine side without the feeling guilt or the constant thought of “what would my parents think” in my head. After that, I discovered there are situations where I show masculine traits and feminine traits more so than the other. For example, I consider myself masculine, but when I am intimate with a man, I tend to take on the feminine role. I definitely do not believe that roles are required for a relationship to exist. But I equally want the man I am with to be just as masculine. In fact, I will most likely not pursue a relationship with a man if I feel that he is not as “masculine” as I would like him to be. This also relates to my envy of women and their relationships with men. In most heterosexual relationships that I have seen, I view the “masculine” man as the protector. Or someone you can rely on for emotional support; ironic since most men are brought up to not express too much emotion at all.

Because I am a homosexual man, most people will stereotype me as being very feminine. But the fact that I do not exhibit these qualities often confuses someone who is very new to the concept of “what being gay” means. In fact the majority of people that I share inform that I am gay often do not believe me. Sometimes their behavior towards me would change completely. Women would be more trusting of me, and treat me as if I was "one of the girls", which was also ironic being that I shared only a few feminine traits with them. But most women do find security in having a male gay friend since they feel they can confide in them and get a male's opinion about certain things without being judged or being thought of sexually. Most men would actually become more comfortable around me and more trusting. Some even ask for advice from the

"feminine" side on topics such as dating. Some would even ask very intimate questions that they may be too self-conscious to ask a woman. The only conflict I had with guys after coming out to them was when I was still attending high school. When a few guys discovered I was gay, they sometimes ridiculed me. In the locker room they were hesitant to come near me, which never happened before I came out. This would be an example of Stereotype threat, or when a group is informed about a stereotype and the group's performance is affected by the stereotype (Gender in Communication pg 33). Because of all of these factors I have mostly been labeled as "in the middle" in terms of masculinity and femininity. My best friend is very straight, and has the reputation of being a ladies man. However he shows very distinct feminine traits more so than me. In fact many believed that he was gay and I am straight when we are first getting acquainted with people. So if someone who has many relationships with women and someone who has relationships with men often get their sexuality confused, is there really a true purpose for stereotyping? Another friend of mine, Mikey, is a hermaphrodite. He was born with both female and male genitalia. His outward appearance is very ambiguous. If one day he feels like he is a male, he will dress like and behave like a male. And if one day he feels like a female, he will dress and behave like a female.

Because of the way I have been brought up, and the surrounding influences in society, I was expected to act the way a man is expected to act. And there is the fact that I am a homosexual that many expect me to act with the traditional feminine qualities that most homosexuals are known to have. Because I view myself as a predominantly masculine male, my own gender identity is not as unique compared to most who struggle with it. Many may view me as very masculine and without feminine qualities. I do consider myself a male biologically and psychologically, however there are times where I do show feminine qualities and I believe that is

perfectly normal. People may think that they are only male or female when declaring their gender, however it is normal to show traits of female behavior if you consider yourself male and vice versa.

Pretty Hurts Unique Gender Construction

It was loud. Music was blaring. All my six-year-old eyes could see were flashes of light and of course my personal fan club, my family. Equipped with signs and cheers of “woo you did it kassie”. I probably had enough hair spray in my hair to make a hole the size of my head through the Ozone layer. I looked to my left and to my right. I was the only girl who looked like me who placed top five. There was an older white woman pinning a sash across my chest while another was placing a tiara atop my head of coiffed pageant hair. I had trained for months with my Russian dance coach who made sure to choreograph a dance number to wow the judges to a popular song. I made sure to practice my routine daily, enunciate perfectly when asked a question, and of course to smile. You can never smile too much. At such a young age my unique gender construction, was determined by the thought that girls were supposed to be smart but more importantly be pretty. Every girl my age wanted to be a princess, I knew that if I did my best then I would be like a princess, just like in the movies.

Social learning Theory teaches us that gender is a learned behavior in which correct modeling is rewarded and incorrect modeling is punished. An example of social learning theory as it pertains to society, would be a girl that is labeled a tomboy. Simply because she rejects common stereotypes of what it means to be “lady like” i.e.- (wear makeup, wear heels, specific hairstyles etc.) Her peers may ostracize this young woman and even her sexual preference may come under scrutiny. In extreme cases a woman could even be assaulted due to her attire. This is a modern example of punishment for incorrect modeling. Specifically incorrect modeling of what society deems as incorrect attire for a girl, in return that behavior is punished. When I was in the pageant that was an example of correct modeling being rewarded. In the most overt sense being rewarded a trophy, tiara, and a title “Miss Congeniality” were physical rewards. These

were accolades presented to me for modeling exemplary standards of what little girls should appear to be. In the more covert sense the reward for my correct modeling made me feel appreciated and respected by society. At six years old my frame of reference was between Disney Movies and my West Indian family. In every movie the princess was always smiling, gentle, and available to everyone to help.

As a society we push gender norms unto children from birth in the things that we do. At a baby shower decorations most times are consistent with the baby's gender. Pink for a baby girls and blue for baby boys. This follows through to early childhood with the toys parents gift their children with. Trucks, baseballs, and building sets are all most times given to boys. Where as dress up sets, dolls, and easy bake ovens are given to little girls. Cognitive development is described as human behavior by understanding identity development as a process with stages. This pertains to gender as children go through stages of understanding their gender. As a child gender norms are forced upon them through language, media, and institutions. Children are taught through institutions such as schools about gender, in most times in the most simplest of fashions. They learn boys and girls use different restrooms or they may even walk on two separate lines according to said gender. This is their first idea that there is a difference in gender. That boys are different than girls or vice versa. Culture is also an influential part of cognitive development. If children are raised in households where gender roles are emphasized they then internalize these gender cues and act them out. In a broader spectrum these cultural cues may come from the families ethnic backgrounds belief. Growing up in a West Indian or commonly known as household, my gender cues came from my mother and grandmother. There was always an emphasis placed on appearance. The thought was that as women it is your duty to always look your best. Your hair must always be done as well as your nails, because before people know who

you are they “see” you. I also remember phrases flying around such as “women like children should be seen and not heard”. Which at a young age caused me to believe that I could be smart but to be pretty opened much more doors. To be seen and not heard meant, to pick and choose my battles and suppress my own feelings. As an adult some seventeen years later while watching a Beyonce video entitled “Pretty Hurts” in which she strips away at the facades of pageants I was able to yet again cognitively redevelop what I viewed as my construction of gender.

Biological theories are theories that seek to use biology to describe gender construction. Chromosomes and genitalia are distinctly different, anatomically of course for the purpose of reproduction, as well as the meaning associated with both male and female genitalia. There is strength and pride in how men feel about their penis. Women are like conquests for many men to just be another notch on their belts. Young men are encouraged to sow their oats, while young women are encouraged to remain virgins or at least not seem sexual. As a young girl my grandmother would have conversations with me about how important it was to keep my legs crossed. In the physical sense so no one would catch a peek up my skirt and also I believe figuratively it was a gender cue that my vagina was to be hidden tucked away and not exposed. Where as on road trips with my little brother my family would suggest my brother urinate publicly behind a tree, but still in the possible sight of others. As a boy if he is “exposed” it’s not as bad as girl were to perform the same action.

Social learning theory, biological theory, and cognitive development are influential in determining how we think and explore gender. All of these theories were the brain behind the experiences, which shaped the way I think of gender. Last year pop singer Beyonce Knowles, of which herself was a pageant girl released a visual music video entitled “Pretty Hurts” the song itself describes the perils of beauty that women must face in terms of a specific standard of

beauty. The music video takes place at a pageant where Beyonce is competing with young women and behind the scenes there are many ugly moments that Beyonce as well as other contestants take part in. The actors are seen in the video swallowing orange-juiced soaked cotton balls to substitute for meals and other extremes to be thin. The ending scene of the video is poignant for me and symbolizes who I am now in my own unique gender construction. In the last scene of the video Beyonce physically breaks all of her trophies and her tiaras. This moment was perfect in describing the difference between as child believing that if I acted a specific way I would embody the true traits of a girl. In relation to being a female adult and understanding my gender construction is not determined by how much I smile and if I choose to not speak my mind. Women should be seen and heard and for that fact acknowledged in every aspect of society.

Analysis Paper #1: Social Construction of Gender

In analyzing the social construction of my unique gender, I have chosen to examine myself over my childhood and teenage years. My identity was molded growing up through my experiences, and I am now in a position to objectively look back and inspect the making of my gender identity. Reflecting and making connections to the book *Gender and Communication* will hopefully bring about new ideas and answers about myself and my gender identity.

I have always known the male gender as far less pressured and confined than the female gender. Growing up with a single mother and three sisters, I was the only male in the household, and that was made clear by the roles in which I had in at home. My three sisters shared a fairly equal amount of household chores, all very similar, while separate I had a set of chores. While they were obligated to clean the house, washing dishes, sweeping, mopping and such, my main duties were to maintain my own room, throw out the trash, and take the necessary trips to the store.

The division in household chores was not a privilege of my choosing. It was constructed by my mother, as her beliefs were guided by cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony denotes the dominance of beliefs and ideas portrayed in media on the mainstream majority. My mother was taught that women are better fitted for household duties, and serve more prominent roles in the home. She learned these ideas from the people she grew up around, who learned from mainstream culture.

There were also major differences in how we were conditioned to go outside. All of my sisters were taught to have companionship whenever they were to go outside for the means of safety and protection. I on the other hand was free to go out practically whenever I wanted, not

having to worry as much about my own safety. My curfew was typically not as strict as my sisters' were, and my mother was not as concerned about me being out at night.

These experiences fall in line with the assumption in the shared assumption in gender studies that "one cannot study gender/sex unless one also studies systems of hierarchy" (DeFrancisco, Palczewski & McGeough 45). Power influences gender and communication, so it is best to be cognizant of that and understanding of it. I recognize the privileges that I had in my household as the only brother, and the male privilege that I had outside of it. I was less constrained, and less obliged by gender.

However, male privilege has not exactly exempted me from hardship or subjection. In defining the term intersectionality, DeFrancisco, Palczewski and McGeogh describe gender identity as "not separable from the person's race, class, sex, sexual orientation, citizen status, or religion (p. 8). Being a Hispanic male, my race has greatly influenced my gender identity throughout my teenage years. In one particular instance, I recall wearing a run-of-the-mill hoodie and sneaker, walking through a troubled neighborhood. Police officers stopped me and insisted that I had been seen with a cluster of men who I had never met before. They questioned me, frisked me, and held me for upwards of ten minutes before finally letting me go. There have been a few other instances wherein I have been wrongly stopped by police officers, and plenty others of being followed around retail stores. Not only gender, rather a combination of that and race, have influences on how I am perceived by people. Intersectionality has made me adjust the way that I present myself, as being a Hispanic male, I am more prone to negative perceptions.

My gender identity is a result of the social experiences that I have encountered with different people throughout my life. My goal is to take these experiences, learn from them and apply them. As a result, I hope to broaden and enhance my perception of gender as a concept.

Works Cited

DeFrancisco, Victoria L., and Catherine Helen. Palczewski. *Gender in Communication: A Critical Introduction*. 45. Print.

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Prof. Waychoff

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Assignment #1

Gender, the behaviors and appearances society dictates a body of a particular sex should perform. Identity, how people see themselves as individuals and as members of groups and how others see them as individuals. Sexual orientation: whether one is physically and romantically attached to or has sex with persons of the same sex, the other sex or both. Where my family is from these are big issues; your gender, your identity and your sexual orientation.

My family is from Jamaica and if there is anything you need to know about Jamaica in the 90's and now is that if you identify as a homosexual, then "it" or you are not ok. If you identified as anything other than heterosexual you would be out casted, disowned or worse, killed. This form of ideology is created because of the deep impact that religion had in our culture. Culture is the learned patterns of behavior and attitudes shared by a group of people. Within my culture, Christianity doesn't say that we are meant to be with people of the same sex and in the bible when you did something wrong, so you were often jailed or stoned because the people in my country followed this idea like it is law. My highly religious culture would come together as little groups, and just go stoning people who were openly or even questionably queer.

If a person identified as homosexual, they lived a difficult life. In Jamaica they created their own words to describe "males" or "females" that by appearance seemed show homosexuality. "*Battyman*", this word means a male that is attracted to or has romantic relations

with other males. If you were labeled a *Battyman*, you were labeled as this for the rest of your life. Social Reality is reality understood through the symbols used to represent ourselves. If you were a feminine shirt, then you are feminine in some sort of way. In Jamaica, the social reality is that if you look it, then you are. In my opinion, it has become a tradition to nationally allow our own people to kill our own people.

My parents were born in Jamaica but I was born here. My mother was a devout Christian. She was brought up to be heterosexual female that followed feminine roles. She did the feminine chores because that is what our culture teaches the women to do. While the men did what men are brought up to do, they worked jobs and came home to food already put on the table. Aside from doing chores, my whole family; on my mother's side went to church and were extremely true their beliefs. I don't know much about my dad, but I knew he was against any other sexuality that wasn't his own. Unfortunately for them, this is not how I grew up.

I was born in 1994, a female. As per usual, my baby clothes were all pink. As a toddler, this changed because we were poor. Whatever my mother could afford, was what I wore; whether it was a feminine shirt with masculine pants and jacket, it didn't matter. My mother worked all morning, day and part of the night. So I was mostly with my dad all time. He fixed cars and drove taxis, because of this I knew more about how to fix a car then to braid my own hair. I wore jeans over dresses and sneakers instead of sandals. My friends were always boys instead of girls, which was received wrong all the time. By the time, I started to dress myself my parents would say what I wore was "boyish" or "not right".

I remember, I was about 11 and I was whistling and my dad told me to stop because in our culture that was meant to be done by men. After that, I realized that I wasn't like my parents.

I had friends that already knew that they were attracted to people of the same sex, but I could never tell my parents. They probably would have told me that their sin would rub off on me because I was around people like that. I never saw anyone as wrong or different, I was friends with humans. Violence continuum is the views of gendered/sexed practices and the degree of violence within each of them on a continuum. This meant that as a female, you do female things; you play your role or you will receive some form of violence. At the time I didn't have a word for what I was going through, it was like violence continuum. My father wanted me to hang out with other females and do my hair all pretty and be straight. If I didn't, I would get punished, because of this I don't share my family's views or my culture's views on gender, identity or sexual orientation.

During my high school years, I had friends that identified as queer or lesbian and even some that were going through transition. Due to being around both straight and homosexuals, I concluded that my expectations of people is to just respect one another. We don't have to try and understand why a person is the way they are. We should all, as a group, learn to love one another regardless of beliefs. As I think about the person that I am today, one quote covers my feelings toward gender. "Gender is not something you were born with or learned only from interactions with parents" (DeFransico 45). My gender comes from what I feel comfortable as.

I identify as a 20 year old, cisgender, female that is still trying to figure out her exact sexuality. I, [REDACTED], believe that everyone deserves the right to give love and be loved and not killed or treated any other way that is not done with care, kindness and respect.