

ABSTRACT

Interdisciplinary Influences on Systemic Enlightened Sexism:
Changing the Gender Narrative

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Enlightened sexism is a phenomenon in which a progressed society maintains sexist components that contradict the accomplishments of women's rights movements, as well as the inherent worth of all genders. I explore the ways in which biology, subconscious mechanisms, and language interact to reinforce the perpetuation of sexism in modern American society. Gender is conceptualized as a useful social construct, influenced by biological sex, but fundamentally different from it. The idea of biological sex as deterministic of gender fails to acknowledge an individual's agency in utilizing gender as a tool of identity, as well as fails to acknowledge the role of environment in shaping gender. This new perspective incorporates the importance of gender in the construction of identity, with the acknowledgement that language is complicit in the manifestation of implicit bias that contributes to social inequalities. Misleading views on sex, gender, as well as privilege associated with a particular sex and its appropriate associated gender performance, perpetuate enlightened sexism, and provide a means to justify social inequalities. A key way to dismantle the social norms for gender involves changing the narrative of gender, as well as reconsidering the fight for gender equality as a social justice issue that affects all individuals.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY INFLUENCES ON SYSTEMIC ENLIGHTENED SEXISM:
CHANGING THE GENDER NARRATIVE

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INTRODUCTION

“Man up,” he said.

It was a conversation via Skype, though the ever-present lags and “can you hear me now?” begs the question of whether or not these fitful conversations comprise true communication. I have this tendency to be overly wordy, and the story I had recounted to the miniature pixelated face depicted on my computer screen was lengthy and punctuated by arm flailing for emphasis on parts I found amusing or particularly worthy of notice. It was something along the lines of recounting the unfortunate events of a particularly unfortunate day, one of those times a phone is dropped, screen shattered, vehicles overheat, keys are lost... I suppose I was expecting some sort of sympathy, or even a pity laugh at my bumbling misfortunes, but his response was curt and not at all expected:

“Man up.”

He shifted in his seat, head dipped as he nonchalantly checked his iPhone, elbows spread and shoulders hunched forward as he found a more comfortable resting position. It was a seemingly neutral, almost dismissive tone. It was clear that his mind was on other matters shortly after those words were uttered.

In hindsight, I should not have been surprised at such a response. After all, I cannot imagine a time before the prevalence of phrases of this sort, though my twenty-one years residing on

this earth are arguably not a notable amount of time. I imagine I am not alone, in feeling this unsettled sentiment when confronted with a phrase such as this:

Man up.

Taken aback, I could feel a soft smile creeping upon my face as my mind raced, cheeks reddened, conflicted with how to respond. The feminist, linguistically minded part of me posed in ultimate fighter stance atop my shoulders, arm wrestling with the peace-maker that wanted to let this seemingly innocuous statement slide. After all, I know this friend quite well. I know he aspires to a higher moral standard every day, respects and loves his mother and sister fiercely, and daily devotes his life to honoring and serving others. I knew he didn't mean this phrase to be offensive, and I knew he was not expecting the discussion thereafter. It was an utterance of habit, with its intended meaning far removed from the meaning its words readily evoke and insinuate to its hearer. At this point in time, the peacemaker seemed to be making the most compelling argument.

I paused, attempting to collect my words in the whirlwind of possible responses swirling around my mind.

This pause was long enough for my fellow video chatter to take heed of my shift in mood.

“Is something wrong?”

The poor guy was clearly confused, and understandably so as I was randomly rendered speechless by something he didn't think twice about, something seemingly inconsequential. At least to him.

I cherished these last moments of indecision, in keeping the conversation unruffled, unconvoluted, uncontroversial.

“Yeah. Umm. So....”

I let the awkwardness further flood the air, uncomfortable vibes increasing as each moment passed, until I finally stammered,

“What does that even *mean*?”

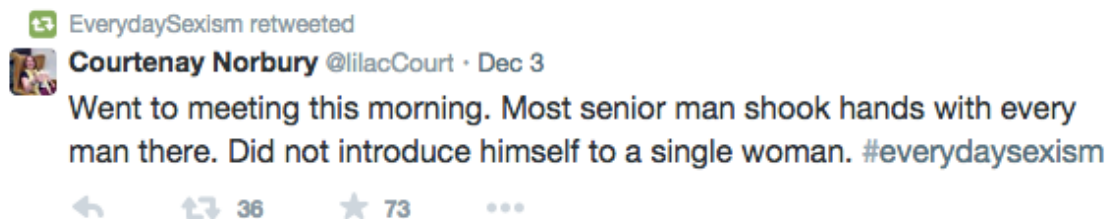
The aforementioned scene has not been an isolated event, and I wouldn't dare insinuate that I am the first to question sexualized phrases such as this one. Even the most basic investigation of the modern English language reveals a tendency to speak in a manner that is touched by gender and its associated stereotypical attributes; however, there seems to be a disconnect between a speaker's intended meaning and a hearer's interpretation of the speaker, which may serve to legitimize sexist language in a society in which blatant sexism is not openly endorsed. After all, Twitter accounts like Laura Bates' “Everyday Sexism Project” exist (TLS), as well as campaigns like HeforShe, with Hermoine Granger¹ turned UN Women Goodwill Ambassador as the face of the organization fighting for gender equality in

¹ ...or, if you are not a Harry Potter fan, you may know of her as Emma Watson.

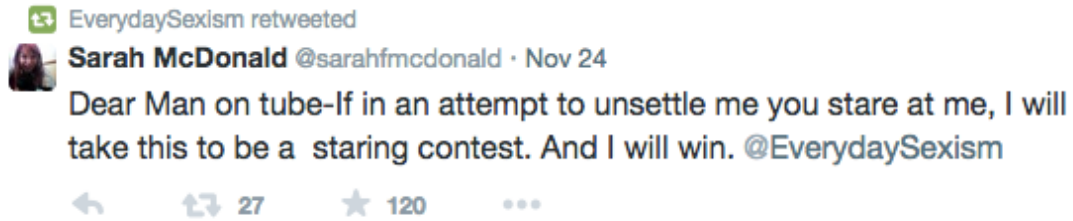
the modern era. We live in a time teeming with social activists, pushing for progress in social inequalities, such as gender inequalities, yet many aspects of these movements lag behind: such as sexist euphemisms. It's a strange situation in that those who say these things would doubtfully endorse unequal pay for their wives and daughters who did equal work (AAUW), nor would they deny a woman the right to vote... so why are women still publicly harassed?



Why is respect for women in the professional world lagging behind?



Perhaps we are not as “progressed” as we thought we were. And perhaps, those innocent little sayings, like “man up,” reflect implicit biases in society that will take much more than mere acknowledgment to enact change. But before change can occur, we must acknowledge what needs to be changed.



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We must face this issue head on: men and women, girls and boys, but without pointing fingers. A common mistake made by many waves of modern feminism seeking equality, demonizing either sex³, is to reinforce the very roles we are trying to abolish, the very roles that are holding us back as a society.

² Screenshots of tweets pulled from the Everyday Sexism Twitter Account: <https://twitter.com/everydaysexism>

³ Such as radical second-wave feminism characterized by misandry, the lesbian agenda, associated with the bra-burning myth. In the words of Wasserstein, speaking through a radical feminist in *The Heidi Chronicles*, "You either shave your legs or you don't."

"Look what's happened since 1776, most of the time, using half our talent. I mean just imagine what's gonna happen when we, you know — go full blast with 100%. And you know, it's incumbent on everybody to try and help people — particularly if you're in a boss's type position, to help the people achieve their potential. And women have every bit the potential men do."

-Warren Buffett

It's a special kind of privilege to be born into the body you wanted, to embrace the essence of your gender even as you recognize what you are up against. Even as you seek to redefine it.

-Lena Dunham

In a TED Talk entitled "Is Anatomy Destiny?":

I want to think about the possibilities of what democracy might look like, or might have looked like, if we had more involved the mothers. And I want to say something a little bit radical for a feminist, and that is that I think that there may be different kinds of insights that can come from different kinds of anatomies, particularly when we have people thinking in groups. Now for years, because I've been interested in intersex, I've also been interested in sex difference research. And one of the things that I've been really interested in is looking at the differences between males and females in terms of the way they think and operate in the world. And what we know from cross-cultural studies is that females, on average -- not everyone, but on average -- are more inclined to be very attentive to complex social relations

and to taking care of people who are basically vulnerable within the group. And so if we think about that, we have an interesting situation on our hands.

Years ago, when I was in graduate school, one of my graduate advisers who knew I was interested in feminism -- I considered myself a feminist, as I still do -- asked a really strange question. He said, "Tell me what's feminine about feminism." And I thought, "Well that's the dumbest question I've ever heard. Feminism is all about undoing stereotypes about gender, so there's nothing feminine about feminism." But the more I thought about his question, the more I thought there might be something feminine about feminism. That is to say, there might be something, on average, different about female brains from male brains that makes us more attentive to deeply complex social relationships and more attentive to taking care of the vulnerable. So whereas the fathers were extremely attentive to figuring out how to protect individuals from the state, it's possible that if we injected more mothers into this concept, what we would have is more of a concept of, not just how to protect, but how to care for each other. And maybe that's where we need to go in the future, when we take democracy beyond anatomy, is to think less about the individual body, in terms of the identity, and think more about those relationships. So that as we the people try to create a more perfect union, we're thinking about what we do for each other.

-Alice Dreger

PART ONE

MECHANISMS OF ENLIGHTENED SEXISM

CHAPTER ONE

Rhetoric of Empowerment

For the West, especially the United States, everyday sexism is obscured from the untrained eye. It is a disease under the skin contracted by a combination of factors: an intersection of socialization, biological predispositions, and subconscious pathways. The inequalities that the modern, educated Western woman experiences are passive in nature, not necessarily intentional, remnants from our recent and not so recent history. These latent indicators of enduring gender inequality are in the language we use (Chew), the movies our children watch (England), in the business plans of multi billion dollar industries (Mears).

Seemingly paradoxically, American citizens are elbows deep in demands of “girl power” from “freedom fighters” such as the Spice Girls, the Kardashians, and the Carrie Bradshaw figures of mass media (Douglas 2). Freedom is given through power, and power is given through sex (Douglas 19). Through Wonderbras. Through all that is seductive and alarming, enticing the desires of men and competing with other women. Some approaches to the promotion of gender equality have turned feminism into a commodity, taking advantage of a hot topic to ensure virility: in the name of questioning the sexist status quo, organizations will pull stunts such as dressing up six year olds like princesses to drop “f-bombs” for feminism (Dewey). In this instance, feminism is a commodity, utilizing social capital for capitalistic gain. Feminism is also seen as an “f-word” (Abowitz 43), associated with curmudgeon witches and lesbians, man hating and proudly brandishing hairy armpits and manly loafers (Douglas 17). If you ask Rush Limbaugh, feminism was conveniently created for ugly women to integrate into society with ease... (Valenti 10)

Embedded feminism refers to the historic fight for gender equality that exploded in the 70's (Douglas 21). Today, it is "woven into our cultural fabric" (Gill qtd. in Douglas 9) basically a "given", assumed to be accomplished through the payment of our feminist foremothers. In spite of a generational gap between today's activists and the foundational feminists, speaking from an array of differences and disagreements (Douglas 6), there seems to be an overarching question that serves as a measurement of progress within women rights movements: Are men and women equal?

My first overarching question is similarly simple, and will serve as the first of many themes that will pervade the following discourse on gender:

Have we achieved gender equality?

Is the ability to choose unlimited sex partners⁴ or the perfect leopard panty an accurate depiction of *real* power?

How about in comparison to financial autonomy? Political parity with male political figures?

Some powers, such as political, social, and economic powers (not contingent on purchasing power or sexual power) would certainly be more accurate indicators of the achievement of gender equality, and are appropriately the focus for social activists who label themselves as feminists. According to United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, a Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on

⁴ Which is actually *not* supported by the literature. Surveys of college students resulted in the acknowledgement that there is differential treatment of genders regarding stigma associated with having multiple sex partners. (Blumberg, Crawford & Popp qtd. by Silegman and Rider 387-388)

Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, equality between women and men (gender equality): refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys (OSAGI).

So perhaps the answer to my overarching question is also a simple one: Have we achieved gender equality? My own humble response: probably not.

Susan J. Douglas, the author of *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work is Done*, acknowledged the aforesaid incongruity among feminist movements, and offered up an explanation: we live in a convoluted time in which retrograde images of women are not retrograde, but a modernist depiction of irony (Douglas 14). Today we acknowledge the feminist movement as merely historical, already accomplished, outdated and reeking of misandry. Douglas paints a picture of pop culture of heaving boob jobs and female stereotypicality, appealing to the masses because it is *amusing* and *empowering* for a woman to not only acknowledge the limitations of her gender in the past, but also recognize the modern opportunity to *choose* them for herself (Douglas 16)!

Today's *bustier feminism* (Douglas 1) is a fashionable and fun makeover of what it is to be a woman, ignoring empowerment of the whole in favor of freedom of personal choice: which is all well and good on the surface, but crumbles in sensibility once its foundations are prodded, once it is apparent that this form of empowerment is through sex, through physical beauty (Douglas 18-19). It is escapism at its best, a façade, an illusion of empowerment (Douglas 21). And the major vehicle delivering this illusion of equality is the media. Pop culture, through images partially created through the mechanisms of the fashion industry, depicts the ideal woman as a waif with legs mile-long, contributing to an increasingly

consumerist society with its eyes fixed on form versus function, the aesthetic, the newest and best product (Mears 11). It tells us what we should look like, offering up prescriptions of masculinity and femininity that reek of racism, sexism, classism, and most of the “isms” that serve to oppress and marginalize (Mears 16, Douglas 11). This is an industry whose lifeblood depends on the glorification of all that is on the surface: the fashion industry is the only industry, other than sex work, in which women’s pay surpasses that of men’s (Mears 212).

This state of affairs exemplifies Susan J. Douglas’ argument that the modern tactics of pursuing gender equality may be characterized by the objectification and sexualization of women as an illusion of power (Douglas 10, 13). The fashion world depicts this phenomenon of enlightened sexism, though in a concentrated, exaggerated form for our purposes at hand; it is an industry in which women serve as capital, who are models because they are tantalized by their fantasies of clawing their way to the top (Mears 45). The “girls” cling steadfastly to an illusion of power that traps them into the virtually unwinnable game of fashion: the industry operates through a complex, but topsy turvy version of basic economic principles; prestige and income are inversely related, in that prestige is priceless, brandished by the models who are penniless, while the model who consistently earns money enjoys little to no prestige (Mears 41). It is an “exercise in delayed gratification” that serves to keep women in the game in spite of its potential to wreck them financially and psychologically (Mears 38-39, 68-70).

This is a game that manipulates, champions its winnings as attainable for the masses, in spite of a model’s low probability of success (Mears 51). It is a pseudo-survival of the fittest, albeit dramatized for our purposes of demonstrating enlightened sexism, reflects the nature of the media’s depiction of the changing landscape of women’s rights, similarly reflecting popular opinions of the nature of gender equality as a whole. Even though women

are no longer limited to skirts, corsets, or the potentially fruitless role as a housewife, they are bombarded with a duplicitous media that objectifies and exploits, all with the guise of empowerment (Douglas 10).

What a strange phenomenon, for both the fashion world and today's enlightened sexism; in spite of surmounting evidence of the dehumanizing effects of placing too much importance on appearance (Heflick 572), popular opinion on what it means to be powerful seems to be sorely, unfortunately misinformed. Assuming that entire subsections of society are not secretly self-destructive, I would assume that something else is at play, something that is powerful enough to inflict such notable effects, but subtle enough to prevent the conscious acknowledgement of such a detrimental ideology.

Modern sexism thrives only insofar that it is implicit and cloaked in rhetoric of empowerment, such as in the case of Douglas' enlightened sexism. Blatant sexism is no longer in fashion, but its subtle brother has remained in its shadow. While women's inclusion in the workforce has been on the up and up, inequalities linger; even at the university level, where intentional efforts are made to recruit more women into the sciences, subtle biases in favor of male students, while unintended, impede women's full participation in academia, depreciate their salaries, and pose other barriers that disadvantage some students simply based on their sex (Moss-Racusin et al 16478). Studies have shown that even perceptions surrounding feminine sounding names of *hurricanes* are touched by gender bias; a hurricane referred to as *Hurricane Victoria*, in spite of its actual intensity, will be perceived as less risky, less deadly than a hurricane named *Victor* due to male schemas of power and aggression (Jung et al 8782). Implicit bias in response to hurricane category labels within the realm of meteorology is dangerous because it influences preparedness and risk assessment, which are directly related to survival. Implicit bias within the realm of gender studies may

provide the link between the unpopularity of blatant sexism and the prominence of gender inequalities alongside rhetoric of empowerment. This bias may not be dangerous in the same way a hurricane might be, but its influence is similarly far-reaching.

This introduction of gender biases as subtle leads me to my second overarching question: How can we, with reason and intellect, regard the genders as equal, yet condone sexism that endures today?⁵

⁵ A phenomenon I will subsequently refer to as “cognitive dissonance”, as it is a term that refers to mental conflict regarding new information. The feminist movements are relatively “new”; the dissonance is the rationally acknowledgment of the inherent worth of all genders, alongside the perpetuation of subtle sexism in modern society.

CHAPTER TWO

The Subconscious of Sexism

Implicit biases are distributed through language, and we are concerned with the narrative—the words we speak—for a number of reasons. The way we speak reflects our own values, as well as the values of the society (or environment) in which we live (Sapir 227) specifically, in the case of our sticky situation of enlightened sexism, our language reflects implicit biases that we may personally hold, or even reflect implicit biases of the dominant views of our environments. So these subconscious tendencies may partially explain this gap between rationally acknowledging the genders as equal—those biases may spring forth from a place in which reason, while related, does not necessarily dominate. My interest in the subconscious as an explanation for this case of cognitive dissonance⁶ in terms of talking about gender equality came from a relatively short book that I initially picked up to serve as an easy summer read, a book that ended up shaping my perspective on what makes a human human.

I would imagine that in response to the question of the main difference between humans and animals, most would refer to concepts of sentience, or perhaps rationality, especially if considering moral status or other philosophical domains (Jones 1-2). Aside from the fact that humans are most certainly part of this animal kingdom, those responses would be reasonable; however, I must address a few issues regarding the latter assertion. A great deal of behavior is subject to reflex and habit, processes that do not necessarily operate under informed consent. I am indeed perched atop the shoulders of intellectual giants when I make these claims: Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* offers

⁶ See footnote five for a reminder of what I mean by “cognitive dissonance” within the context of gender equality and society.

up a picture of humanity that forgoes this emphasis on reason as a defining characteristic, and coincidentally, was that “easy” summer read that ended up greatly influencing my own perspective. Any cursory exposure to Gladwell’s *Blink*, or even Dan Ariely’s *Predictably Irrational*, a book that evaluates irrational behavior as systematic, predictable, and characteristic of humankind, informs us that humans are not very rational. In fact, in many regards, humans are quite the opposite. We operate on a day to day basis very much out of focus with reality; our bodies thrive using a sort of autopilot (Agid 920). How else would we sort out the immense amounts of stimuli we experience daily?

Both books drew connections to my own training as an undergraduate student of psychology, the study of a curriculum that presents foundational studies of unconscious in the early days of Psychology. In fact, I was one of the many wide-eyed freshmen at a university, slightly horrified (but strangely entertained) in response to lectures on Sigmund Freud. His web of theories are vast, but the ones that tend to generate an audience of nervous gigglers are theories such as the oedipal complex and penis envy, images of genitalia haunting dreams and the minds of all who encounter Freud’s controversial arguments. His presentation of the subconscious is dark and murky with the shameful desires of an id whose behaviors slightly resemble that of a manic, sexualized toddler, combined with a hyper-sensitive superego, and the ego, another aspect of consciousness straining to appease the two extremes. Freud certainly paved the way for the exploration of the subconscious, as well as for the clinical practice of psychiatry, but thankfully, most researchers and practitioners in the field of psychology are no longer preoccupied by dreams of phallic symbols and maternal desire as the sole explanation for wavering mental health, or explanations of behavior. Granted, proponents of psychoanalysis exist today, but with a number of conceptual deviations from those of its founder (Rycroft 60).

A colleague of Freud was similarly fascinated by the nature of dreams, and regarded the power of the subconscious⁷ as more than a “dustbin” for those unimportant, unnoticed thoughts that are forgotten or repressed (Jung, *The Language of Dreams* 226). Carl Gustav Jung saw dreams as a bridge between the conscious mind and that of the subconscious (Jung, 226), which is apparent in many of his works analyzing the content of dreams. Though Jung maintains that what makes humans *human* is all that is primordial and predisposed (Jung, *Archetypes* 78-79), it is apparent in his study of fairytales, various eastern and western religions, philosophy⁸, anthropology, that not only did he claim that attributes of what is internal is manifested in social factors⁹, but also that these social factors are due consideration.

These men were certainly learned, passionate, and trail blazers within the field of psychology; however, the literature does not support Freud’s nor Jung’s view of consciousness. Their views were not debunked per se; rather, their ideologies could neither be confirmed nor denied. The empiricism movement, as well as the establishment of Psychology as a natural science driven by the systematic study of mental processes and behavior, necessitated that the study of consciousness take on a form that would make empirical support feasible. While Freud, Jung, and other revolutionary thinkers of the field

⁷ Early psychoanalytic writing used the word *unconscious* to signify mental activity outside of awareness, and Freud specifically believed the unconscious to house distressful thoughts too uncomfortable to consciously acknowledge. For the sake of consistency, I will use only the term *subconscious*, not to strip the heritage of unconscious study from its meaning, but to emphasize thoughts and messages that are subliminal, automatic, or implicit, often resulting in latent manifestations of subconscious thoughts through behavior and cognitions.

⁸ In the paper *Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype*, Jung prefaced his discussion with the acknowledgement that he was standing atop the shoulders of giants: specifically, he referenced Plato’s idea on forms as influential on his ideas on the archetypes.

⁹ As to not be misleading, let me clarify that Jung vehemently opposed the *tabula rasa* perspective, which would emphasize experience as the main formative factor in an individual’s life, and in his paper *Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype*, he points out that “archetypes are not disseminated only by tradition, language, and migration, but that they can rearise spontaneously, at any time, at any place, and without any outside influence.” So in the consideration of socialization, Jung would likely reiterate that primordial factors are living and breathing and are manifested through various institutions of society as influenced by the evolutionary collective unconscious, rather than social factors influencing the thoughts and inclinations of the individual. Both the personal and collective unconscious are innate, a direct contradiction with the empiricist perspective.

of Psychology may have described facts of the conscious mind in totality, there simply is no way to empirically support their claims.

Today's study of the subconscious has taken on other forms: concepts like procedural memory (SAGE 2007), the theory of adaptive unconscious (Lakin), and concepts such as subliminal messages demonstrate the indirect studies of subconscious phenomena through conducting research on what is thought to mediate what people say and do and subconscious mechanisms (SAGE 2009). These are studies on first impressions, effects of priming on memory (Roediger), and how the phrase "golden arches" summon the image of McDonalds in the mind of the average American citizen. The research literature on implicit memory, as well as implicit learning, is interdisciplinary as well as vast. Studies of linguistic theory have explored implicit mechanisms through the scope language: for example, implicit memory influences key aspects of first language acquisition (Ellis). We learn complex language structure not through rigorous language classes, but through observation and interactions with caregivers. We develop language with impressive speed in the first years of our lives, yet is unlikely that we could have explicitly explained what grammatical structure we were using when we differentiated "dada" from "mama" as young children, or learned that the neon fuzzy duck in storybooks referenced those brown squawky creatures more relevant to every day experiences (Heath 60) This phenomenon is nicely explained in Nick Ellis' paper *Implicit and Explicit Knowledge About Language*:

This is a difference between explicit and implicit knowledge—ask a young child how to form a plural and she says she does not know; ask her "here is a wug, here is another wug, what have you got?" and she is able to reply, "two wugs."

Across the lifespan, we learn many things, some of which function through pathways not readily apparent or necessarily able to be explicitly verbalized without formal instruction; however, simply because we fail to consciously acknowledge the complex grammatical structure through which we communicate does not negate its power over the form of our personal brand of linguistic behavior; likewise, subconscious influence continues to shape our cognitions and behavior in spite of our failure to actively acknowledge its existence or power.

Additionally, language serves as a manifestation of many factors, whether the scope of interest is in social matters or that of the individual: for the individual, language serves as a vessel for our cognitions. However, our cognitions certainly do not exist in a vacuum¹⁰. We tend to place great emphasis on personal ownership of private thought, sometimes forgetting that, while we are individuals residing in an individualistic country¹¹, we are also mirrors of our experiences.

In short, there are some aspects of being human that reason simply cannot touch, aspects that are influenced by stimuli that constantly shape our thoughts and behavior. Implicit influences, presumably a subconscious influence, permeate aspects of our behavior, mentality, and even social characteristics in a way that flies under our conscious radar. We must first acknowledge this possibility, as well as empirical precedent, before we can

¹⁰ Does it go without saying that everything is interrelated? If you asked an eastern philosopher, he would perhaps cite Tao, the ultimate Reality from an Confucian perspective, as evidence of the interconnectedness of reality, though many of eastern philosophies emphasize the interconnectedness of all reality. If you asked a radical behaviorist, your question would likely be snubbed in favor of one that does not dabble with troubling issue of operationalizing internal events, or perhaps concede that the environment acts upon those who inhabit it through stimulus control. It's a tough question, but there is interdisciplinary precedent for asking it.

¹¹ Not the case across the world... speaking of interdependency to a citizen of a collectivistic culture would be something akin to requesting the answer to basic arithmetic. Other cultures readily acknowledge the interdependency of all living things, rather than focusing on the individual's journey through an individualistic world.

understand how subliminal stimuli, as well as our own subconscious, influence what we do and how we do it.

Implicit bias, a pervasive, powerful mental construct, may be a function of the subconscious that contributes to sexism that lingers in a “progressed” society. In fact, many implicit associations that we develop “do not necessarily align with our own declared beliefs”, or reflect stances that we would “explicitly endorse” (Staats). We must also acknowledge the existence of implicit bias: that it is pervasive, and reflective of interconnected implicit and explicit neural pathways (Cooley).

Study of the subconscious influence on behavior has not been limited to psychology, and our evaluation of the role of implicit bias in an enlightened sexist society will pull from a number of disciplines throughout the remainder of this work. In the world of experimental economics, researchers strive to marry academic disciplines that have typically been isolated from each other: specifically, psychological and neurological experimental designs have been embraced by a handful of economists who have used scientific insights on behavior to inform economic decision-making. A paper that looked at masculinity and femininity as predictors of financial risk taking utilized priming in its experimental design; a design that accentuates the subconscious as a continuously active, powerful system that influences decision-making and behavior. Katja Meier-Pesti and Elfriede Penz’ paper, from economic psychology and international marketing and management backgrounds respectively, but also utilized a gender priming design that acknowledges the interactions of biological and social factors in gendered behavior (Meier-Pesti 184). They found that simply identifying with a masculine *characteristic* resulted in increased traditionally masculine behaviors, regardless of biological sex. For their design, masculine behaviors were measured through financial risk-taking, which would not necessarily be an obviously masculine behavior per se; they chose

risk-taking as one of their dependent variables because behavioral economic studies have found normative behaviors according to the gender of the participants. Men tend to take more chances, i.e. financial risk-taking, and women tend to be conservative in their financial choices.

The authors are careful to note that different perspectives explain gender and sex differences according to their own disciplines: a biologist would look to hormones and genes to explain sex differences, an evolutionary and behavioral geneticist would point out underlying genetic conditions conducive to maximizing an individual's number of offspring through finding the most "attractive" mate, whereas a social perspective would identify stereotypical gender roles that socialize men and women to adhere to behaviors that align with social role theory (men characterized by self-assertiveness, agency, and motivation; women as communal, selfless, and caring). They acknowledge that it is quite difficult to disentangle biological effects from social effects on risk behavior. A major caveat of the paper is an interactionist standpoint, acknowledging the many factors that contribute to behaviors of men and women.

In light of social gender theory, changes in society, such as social norms for men and women, combined with the ever-shrinking gap differentiating men and women¹², necessitate the distinction between sex and gender in evaluating financial risk taking. So, in their experiment on high-risk investment behavior, a behavior that is traditionally deemed masculine, investigators Meier and Penz measured the influence of masculine and feminine characteristics apart from the participants' biological sex. For the first study, the researchers predicted that the exhibition of traditionally masculine attributes will coincide with increased

¹² The authors state that "masculine attributes are no longer restricted to men" due to increasing evidence that differences between men and women in terms of masculinity are decreasing (Meier-Pesti 181)

frequency of financial risk, and they tested whether or not these gendered characteristics facilitate influence of sex on the aforementioned measure of risk behavior.

The economic system of interest in the first study is investment behavior, measured by actual investment behavior through self-reports of participants¹³, as well as a hypothetical scenario¹⁴. They used an opportunity sample of participants in public spaces and personal contacts, with sex nearly balanced. They had relatively high socioeconomic statuses: high in both in income and in education level. They used measures of biological sex as well as a masculinity and femininity scale, which would both act as controls within the design. They added age and income as covariates in order to control for their possible effects, and they observed that the more people earned, the more “masculine” they would describe themselves, and as their participants’ age increased, their self-evaluations were more gender neutral.

Most of the participants’ assets were low-risk in the actual investment behavior measure, and similarly, most of them chose lower risk assets in the hypothetical investment scenario, but there was a significant effect of biological sex, specifically in higher risk taking by men in the scale of attitudes toward financial risk taking. However, with masculinity held constant, biological sex effects were rendered insignificant (specifically, the differences between males and females). This supports the emphasis on masculine *attributes* vs. male sex or gender role in evaluating financial risk behavior. Analyses on the mediation of masculinity and femininity and biological sex on risk taking indicated that this is only the case for masculinity; femininity did not influence the financial decisions of the participants. It seems

¹³ A savings accounts to shares questionnaire

¹⁴ They were prompted to imagine they would have 7200 euro, and reported preference of five different investment scenarios given with different potential losses.

that the more closely an individual is aligned with a male role in society, regardless of biological sex, the more risk they are willing to take in financial endeavors.

Meier and Pesti's second study incorporated findings from the first in its design. The sample was taken from the University of Vienna, making the age group more homogenous than the first study's opportunity sample, as well as much younger with an average income markedly less than that of the first sample. They used an experimental design (a 3x2 between subjects' design) that randomly assigned participants to three different visual and semantic priming tasks: a feminine, masculine, and neutral priming task, with the last treatment acting as a control. After the treatment, participants were given questionnaires on a sex role inventory (BEM), and an additional one composed of three different risk measures. Again, incentives were not mentioned, but the previous explanation may be similarly applicable in that students would be most likely willing to participate in an activity that benefits their own environment: their education. They computed effects of both gender priming and biological sex in order to differentiate how each affected masculinity and femininity self-measures. The gendered priming treatments were not matched according to biological sex; meaning that biological males could receive male, female, or neutral priming, and the same for the female participants.

For this second study, only the male sample had significant effects that can be attributed to gender priming, male or female. Males under the feminine priming tended to engage in less risk behavior, whereas no effect of the priming tasks was measured for female samples. A significant interaction between sex and priming was found, specifically in a scale measuring attitudes toward financial risk: males primed with a masculine task correlated with higher rates of risk behavior, but females were not affected in either gendered priming treatment. There were no sex differences between participants under the masculine priming

treatment. This study confirmed the first's finding that masculinity is associated with more financial risk taking, whereas femininity was not associated. The two studies were compared, and higher ratings of masculinity were correlated with higher hypothetical financial risk taking.

The priming procedures, procedures that implicate subconscious neural processes, shaped the participants' behavior in such a way that participants defied gendered norms on financial risk-taking behavior, whereas no sex differences were found (Meier-Pesti 191).

Armed with the knowledge of the "masculinization" of the Western woman, or perhaps the shrinking differences in masculinity between men and women have necessitated the reconsideration of how we evaluate gender and its relation to behavior. Priming, an experimental tool used to pinpoint neural processes commonly thought of as subconscious, played a key role in shaping behavior in the aforementioned design.

In the next chapter, I will explore another particularly powerful bias that has permeated American culture across somewhat recent history, a bias that was questioned within the world of experimental economics by Meier-Pesti and Penz: the dichotomy of gender, and the misleading practice of treating gender as synonymous and deterministic of biological sex.

CHAPTER THREE

“Let’s Talk About Sex, Baby”

Salt-N-Pepa

In the previous gender priming design, the authors presented a critique of the research world, the common interchange of sex with gender, as well as a design that differentiated the effects of both constructs on behavior. The study was novel in that it took a very prevalent research topic and tweaked it in order to provide more precise results: that male biological sex may not be associated with more risk behavior; rather, higher levels of risk behaviors are exhibited among individuals, biologically male or female, with more *masculine characteristics*, which are largely contingent on societal factions and norms, not only biology and genetics. This specificity in the design implies that the risk behaviors of men and women are more similar than the economic market often assumes, especially among younger generations, groups that are more educated, with higher incomes. This means that in reality, young businesswomen may make financial decisions that are traditionally associated with male behaviors. This study provides us with a number of important implications.

This clarification of the nature of both socially-sanctioned gender and biological sex in academia not only questions the norm of using sex and gender interchangeably, but the social norm of evaluating biological sex as deterministic of gendered behavior. So, if empirical evidence suggests that biological sex alone does not predict gender attributes, through the study of behavior, then our understanding of gender does not need to be limited by the social understanding of biological sex, which is commonly understood as a binary.

Reflecting this common sentiment, so far I have spoken of both sex and gender in dichotomous terms, perhaps even unintentionally synonymously, an act that serves as a

reflection of the normative view on sex and gender in the society in which I live. However, this perspective is not necessarily supported by the literature. Nonetheless, this dichotomous understanding of sex and gender has thrived; following is a presentation of the differences between biological sex and gender.

The expression of gender, while related to biological sex, is characterized by the influence of social factors, and sexual dimorphism, the norm for the Western Americas, is firmly rooted in tradition: historical and cultural. The male/female view, the framework attributed to both sex and gender, is not a feasible framework, especially if deeming them mutually exclusive. After all, when considering gender differences between the two traditionally deemed categories, more inter-group differences than between-group differences tend to be found (Doyle & Paludi 16)

So why do we?

It is important to consider what I am not saying: while each and every one of us is certainly a precious, delicate, unique little flower, our biological sexual differences (while not necessarily binary) were at the mercy of a couple of processes; sexual determination and sexual differentiation, both of which are complicated processes that involve genetic material calling the shots that result in biological differences between typically developed men and women. These processes, while following the same general pathways across humans, are not necessarily the same across individuals; however, on average, they do share commonalities that likely led to this dichotomous understanding of biological sex, which contributed to the social construction of a gender binary.

It is important to note the weight of the words “on average” in the previous statement. This set of words serves as a sort of understood, not necessarily explicitly explained, caveat placed on any sort of research that attempts to generalize across the greater population. It would be nonsensical to say that any published experimental paper, while peer-reviewed, carefully designed, and inspired by the precedent of former research, publishes results that apply to every single given individual. Averages simply provide us with our best guesses: in strict scientific lingo, I should use *hypotheses*, or perhaps *theories* once reasonably sufficient evidence is collected. Study of gender and biological sex, readily acknowledged as related but distinct, while often emphasizing differences through a dichotomy, may contribute to our ability to make informed guesses regarding behaviors and characteristics of the greater population.

So now back to another potentially misconstrued comment of the penultimate paragraph. Sex and gender...what’s the difference? While the former is known as both a verb and noun (as well as an adjective or adverb depending on its presented form), biological sex refers to the aforementioned biological processes that result in physiological indicators such as sex chromosomes, gonads, reproductive organs, and genitalia (*APA Definition of Terms: Sex, Gender, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation*). The notion of gender is a bit more interdisciplinary: it touches on ideas of identity, general cultural conceptions, and historical tendencies. It is controversial, simultaneously indicative of not only social normative views, but also subject to an individual’s identification as male, female, or intersex (APA). This final category, intersex, refers to a subpopulation who does not fall between the lines we have drawn in what makes males male and females female.

Carelessness in social understandings of sex and gender have been particularly damaging to this group, as we tend to see gender as a binary in spite of evidence to the

contrary, in spite of its damaging effects. This understanding is stubbornly rooted in the biology of the majority, the voiced, those empowered by normative genes; however, a few of every thousand births result in genetic compilations that do not reflect the normative 46 XX, 46 XY characteristic of that of the majority (WHO). The stigma associated with sexual ambiguity, manifested through unique gender expression, is not the global norm across cultures.¹⁵ The births of intersex children, as many as one in every 2,000 births (Dreger 2015, 21) in the United States, make the steadfast adherence to sexual dimorphism not only nonsensical, but also ethically questionable; in a world of dichotomized biology, as well as a dichotomized social category, gender reassignment surgery is a reality for five births a day, in spite of surmounting evidence that its benefits are dubious at best (Dreger 2015, 26, 65).

In the words of Alice Dreger, a professor of clinical medical humanities and bioethics, an academic straddling the line between empiricism and activism: “nature does not draw the line for us between male and female, or male and intersex or female and intersex, we actually draw that line on nature,” (Dreger 2010). Sex is more complex than what our current terminology has allowed. I would argue the same for gender, especially given the common tendency to confuse the two or assume that one predicts the other without fail. Arbitrary lines inflicted by our current common consensus on what sex and gender mean have isolated and silenced a subpopulation that have been historically mutilated and dehumanized (Dreger 2015, 7).

It seems reasonable to subsequently wonder, “why does this matter?” It matters because we must first clearly differentiate what we are born with, those things we are handed, with what we have the agency to choose for ourselves. Wordiness aside, separating gender and biological sex, or at least recognizing the complex nature of the two concepts, is

¹⁵ For example, gender is addressed as a continuum for some Native American cultures as opposed to today’s dichotomized view of gender (Williams 80).

necessary because of the fact that while they are interrelated, they are achieved via different processes. One implies physical measurability, predictability, test tubes, hormones, different types of hardware. The other, while currently limited by implicit biases (not ignoring the fact that explicit biases remain) implies the hope of *agency*, of personal identification. Biology is what we are born with; culture is what we are born into. But gender? This is something with a bit more possibility.

Gender categories, aside from the socially normative perspective as dichotomous gender buckets into which we have thrust acceptable behavior into, refers to sexualized characteristics within a social understanding. These characteristics are referred to in terms of masculinity and femininity, and are at times seen as caricatures: the burly man-beast depicted by characters such as Ron Swanson on the critically acclaimed Parks and Recreation, all buff and brawn, red meat and whiskey. Void of emotion, face full of a luscious handlebar mustache. On the other hand, the oft-caricatured femininity usually involves some sort of fainting and swooning, a sort of melodramatic rendition of a breathtakingly beautiful woman with a faint heart and full breast. To be masculine is to, at the very least, have power; over emotions, ungodly strength reminiscent of a superhero. To be feminine is to either be a sex goddess or a frumpy soccer mom. A “real” woman, with maternal desires and a sexually satisfied husband, or a career-obsessed wench who has rejected her socially sanctioned as well as her femininity; or as so bluntly put in *Syrup* (2013), “women are categorized as mothers, virgins, sluts, bitches, and of course none of the above is suited for the modern business woman.”

These descriptions may faintly resemble what you experience in your day to day life, but odds are, the above paragraph must seem like the ramblings of perpetual over exaggeration. And you would be right. The above descriptions are merely caricature, a work

of fiction. However, simply because something is fiction does not necessarily strip it of truth. Stereotypes, borne from our brain's adaptive ability to generalize, refer to harmful applications of the average to the individual. However, especially in the world of research, the average is what we use to teach us about the observable world in which we live, and studying how things are different is a key way to learn. Helen Fisher, a biological anthropologist, digs up more and more differences between men and women across specific domains: notably in verbal ability. And yes, on average, men tend to be physically stronger. And we don't need an average measure to tell us that women indeed birth more babies than men. Studies of thinking patterns of the sexes have emerged in the literature: women tend to be associated with superior people skills, negotiating skills, and are highly imaginative due to women's complex "web" of thinking. Men tend to disregard information that is extraneous, a form of hyperattention that may indicate more "linear" cognitive styles. Combined with the steady increase of women entering the workforce, these average differences may contribute to average discrepancies in normative roles. For example, women may gravitate to those fields that emphasize strengths normative for their gender; 54% of all journalists, a job that requires exceptional verbal ability, are women.

These *average* differences do not assign one gender as inherently more or less valuable than the other, though if you tried, I'm sure you could find an argument for either side. What seems to be the most reasonable compromise is to value each gender concept equally, not ignoring normative differences between the two concepts of gender, as well as normative differences between the sexes. These differences, while in the context of average differences, are readily apparent. With more and more women entering the workforce, it is paramount that our society turns into a collaborative society and being informed is a precursor to an optimum state of affairs; we must be enlightened about what it means to

identify as a particular gender, or somewhere in between the socially normative constructs, as well as what it means to be born male, female, or intersex. When we understand the talents of the sexes as averages that do not necessarily reflect realities of an individual, then we are that much closer to tearing apart the foundations of an enlightened sexist society. When we understand that imposing a socially constructed view, while influenced by biology and other factors, on a given individual based on biological sex is not a reasonable (or empirically supported) thing to do, we will realize that serious changes need to be made regarding how we approach gender as a useful concept in society, as opposed to a tool of discrimination and oppression when it is mistakenly regarded as reflective of an acceptable gender identity.

PART TWO
A NEW NARRATIVE

CHAPTER FOUR

Pink Frilly Dresses

“So tell me more about your kids growing up... did your boys like trucks and superheroes and things like that? And your girls... all things pink and frilly?”

The previous section may have left you reeling, or perhaps ready to tear down the evil barriers that have been increasingly associated with gender. You would not be alone! My early research was heavy handed in my attempts to establish gender as merely socialized. In my attempts to abolish expectations rooted in misinformed notions of gender, it was far too easy to overlook nature’s role in contributing to gendered behavior. Though sex is not the only predictor of gender, and gender, or gendered attributes, does not necessarily align with an individual’s biological sex, does not mean that the two are arbitrary. While there is danger in not being sufficiently informed about what it means to be born as male vs. identifying as a male, there is also danger in failing to acknowledge great strides that have been made in gender studies, studies that often focus on differences between genders as though it is a dichotomous concept.

In these misguided attempts to recruit biased information affirming my own suspicions, I asked every parent I knew about their baby’s gender development. In fact, the opening quote is verbatim from a conversation I had with a mother and grandmother in her mid-60’s, a perfect person to ask about raising babies and what that was like, the perfect person to give me inspiration for my gender studies. I was convinced that she would reluctantly admit her role in shaping her children’s behavior in gender-normative fashion. I could point to her and exclaim, “Ah-ha! These gender roles are a product of YOUR

generation and its devilish gender role-steeped agenda!” Looking back, I imagine myself foaming at the mouth in anticipation for this woman’s response.

Instead, eyes gleaming with pride, she responded, “The minute they were born, it’s like they *knew*. They knew what’s for boys, what’s for girls.”

Disappointed, I ducked out of that conversation with a bit of a wounded ego. Now how would I *prove* that socialization is the true culprit for these pesky gender roles? It took an embarrassingly long amount of time for me to objectively evaluate that encounter, and that maybe, just maybe, something else is at play here. Because really, Mrs. Treva isn’t a diabolical woman whose sole mission is to maintain the gender status quo. In fact, the behavior of her babies was not so far off from the behavior observed by many parents, and that became increasingly clear the more I dug in empirical literature, and the more I talked to people with firsthand experience with young children. While some little boys like to dress up in their mother’s heels and a dress, and some little girls shun Barbies in favor of Power Rangers, there seems to be average tendencies in children according to gender. Again, simply because we can calculate an average does not mean it is generalizable; however, in the study of human development, averages are certainly useful if understood and implemented correctly. I would also argue that gender is a useful social construct, especially within the context of lifespan human development, as it plays a key role in identity formation.

My presentation of gender as an integral piece of human development will begin with a brief overview of gender development across the lifespan. I assume an intersectional argument that dominates modern academic feminist perspectives, as well as the sociological argument and ecological lifespan human development argument by Bronfenbrenner; we are

the summation of our own genetics as well as our direct and indirect environments in which we live and breath. Our familial structure, ethnicity, communities in which we are born and raised, as well as a host of other possible influences contribute to how we develop.

In the United States, the influence of gender begins well before a baby is born: in various shades of pink and blue, a baby's identity has begun to be formed even before its introduction into the world. As expectant mothers rub their rotund bellies, they wade through the color-coded products of a consumerist society that traditionally categorize its young in a dichotomous fashion, assigning a color that will later refer to socially normative behavior according to his or her gender category. Distinguishable sex organs are apparent by the third month of pregnancy (Sigelman & Rider 98), and around this time marks the beginning of gender reveal parties, nesting, and the onset of societal expectations not only for the parents, but also for their offspring.

Awareness of gender identity occurs during infancy (Morrison 264), a time of rapid development in sensation and perception: basically, this is a time a baby is acclimating to the world, sorting out sensory input and motor responses (Sigelman & Rider 98). At a very young age, evidence supports an infant's ability to produce a gender label, even as young as 18-21 months (Zosuls, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, Shrout, Bornstein, Greulich 9). In a design by Zosuls et al, stereotypical play patterns emerged among the male and female infants, though the majority of play between the two genders was similar, there was a significant difference between genders in two toys traditionally associated with particular genders: female infants tended to play with dolls, and male infants tended to play with trucks (Zosuls et al 11). The researchers hypothesized that socialization processes likely accounted for the differentiation in play between the genders (Zosuls et al 14).

In learning about what it means to live in this world of ours, especially at such a young age, children must also figure out their own self concept and how this self concept influences others' perceptions. Preschool is a marked time for intense socialization of children, especially in comparison to life at home. From infancy to about the age of five or six, children often use gender to help shape identity. As Halim et al. points out, appearance is a “symbolic representation” and method to communicate how we want others to treat us. Since children are developing at such a rapid rate, it is understandable that many associate who they are with what they look like: I'm sure every adult, at one point or another in a lifetime, has witnessed a child plop some sort of item on, self professing him or herself as the role the item represents, i.e. a cowboy hat for a cowboy, tiara for a princess, a cape for a superhero. A method of communicating roles in society includes physical representations of gender, often through means as simple as gendered colors. A “normal” preference for a baby girl is soft pink, all things frilly, and this bias is reflected as early as in a nursery when new parents are preparing a space in their home to introduce their newborn to the ways of the world. This environment may prime the child into a mindset that reinforces that of the rest of society: that what is physical may also represent what is biological, and these biological sex features act as a precursor to socially acceptable behaviors and mannerisms. And it all starts with appearance, an area of research that is sorely underrepresented in the world of gender development research (Halim 1091).

While sociological and environmental influences certainly play a role in the appearance rigidity displayed by young children, Halim et al explore whether or not there is more of an internal role at play as well, a notion referred to as *self-socialization* (1092), a concept within cognitive theories of development. The child of a cognitive central model plays an active role in development, and specifically for our purposes, this means they are

internally motivated to construct their own meanings of gender categories. They investigate gender appropriate behaviors for whatever category he or she belongs, and may pass through an appearance rigidity phase that reflects this cognitive phenomenon, a “manifestation” of their own gender development (Halim 1092).

Imagine explaining to a *Frozen*-clad daughter that no- her pretty dress is only representative of a single facet of feminine characteristics, and oh, by the way, those characteristics are all on a spectrum and that her beloved activity of splashing around in the mud is stereotypically masculine and that the fact that she is wearing a dress does not make her a *girl*... A bit of silly thought, isn't it? So yes, it is natural for the standard human to go through stages of understanding of his or her own gender concept. And yes, those concepts are influenced by a number of things, socialization as one of them, but it is certainly not the lone or most significant factor in shaping this facet of development. Appearance rigidity appears to be a relatively normative stage for children: in the context of development, as well as the formation of gender identity.

So what exactly is appearance rigidity, and why does it happen? Appearance rigidity occurs when little boys and girls are learning for themselves what it means to be little boys and girls. We often teach facts of life in opposites. If you are feeling especially intellectual, you might be thinking of the foundational Aristotelian Law of Contrast, foundational in behaviorism. Especially for a preschool-age group, opposites are particularly meaningful: good and evil, up and down, light and dark. Pink and blue. Soft and rough. Girls and boys. In teaching this, we often assign a particular appearance according to the category: normative dress for boys, and normative dress for girls, which evolves into a child's rigidity in “level of gender stereotypicality” and “frequency of occurrence” (Halim et al.1092). So appearance rigidity is almost exactly what it sounds like: a rigid adherence to one's appearance. For this

age group, the rigidity often plays out through those stubborn clothing preferences such as refusing to wear anything that is not of a certain color or clothing type, most often according to the normative clothing patterns for each respective gender.

This phenomenon was observed and evaluated firsthand by a group of researchers who rounded up some New Yorkers and asked about their children's clothing preferences. The general tendency for appearance rigidity for the girls was "adherence to dresses and skirts and avoidance of pants" (Halim et al. 1094), though the general trajectory of the formations of gender identity is not static; children displaying appearance rigidity most likely will not behave in such a way forever and will experience more flexibility with clothing preferences as they mature (Halim 1099). More fluidity in gender expression is associated with adolescence, such as in dress and behavior; however, curiously, there tends to be more restrictions on deviations from the norm, or childhood gender nonconformity, that begins before adolescence and continues throughout puberty until the age of 18 (Sigelman & Rider 385). Not until adolescence do children "conceptualize gender-role violations as a sign of psychological abnormality and could not tolerate them" (Sigelman & Rider 385).

A second study within their overall design suggested that children view gender identity as "an important and positive aspect of themselves" (Halim 1097). Both boys and girls found their own gender categories as a salient source of self-expression that shaped their behaviors, specifically, their choices in appearance. Gender is useful for the purpose of asserting identity, appearance and otherwise, and plays a role in normative gender development. The expression of gender identity certainly is not a bad thing; in learning who we are, a complicated process at best, it makes sense for young children to learn about themselves through the simplistic (and often play-orientated) expression of appearance; gender, at least conceptually, serves a purpose in lifespan human development through

aiding the formation identity; however, danger abounds when certain values are attached to these gender categories, values that will make such an adherence appearance maladaptive and contributing to psychological distress (Halim et al. 1100). What's interesting about the previous study is that the majority of the boys showed little to no appearance rigidity; rather, they tended to dress as superheroes and adamantly *avoided feminine clothing* if they even showed a clothing preference at all.

Moreover, if the boys' appearance rigidity was characterized by "avoiding other-gender typed clothing," what does this say about what little boys think of their female peers? About what it means to identify as female, or even exhibit feminine characteristics? If gender identity is a positive aspect of the self, what does the extreme avoidance of feminine clothing say about the male children's views on the female gender, even around the ages of 4-6 years old? These curious little sponge-like brains seem to pick up on a nuanced aspect of society at a very early age, but how? In the presently discussed study, the effect of parents' preferences on gendered appearances were evaluated, but no significant effects were found.

How else can children learn about themselves and their own gender identity? What is another potential explanation for the rejection of feminine-wear by the boys in the "frilly dresses" study? Highly prevalent in the ongoing discussion of social influences on gender identity in the literature are studies on the possible effect of media exposure on gender acquisition and expression of gender roles. Disney movies have become a household staple, and the Disney Princess Line has captivated its target audience, young girls, since its creation in 2001 (England et al. 555), and perhaps contributes to the formation of social scripts, and specifically, gender concepts (England et al. 556). A constructivistic perspective generally asserts that children base beliefs of the world off of their observations of the world, thus, supporting claims that stereotypically gendered content in Disney movies may influence

children's thoughts and beliefs on gender (England 557). Along with this idea of gender come certain behaviors and certain roles. Armed with this information, what can we possibly assume? Do Disney movies influence the way its audience sees their own gender identity, gender and its roles as a whole? Can Disney movies contribute to a value hierarchy of gender characteristics?

A study (England 2011) involving a coded content analysis approach evaluated gender role portrayals of nine Disney Princess movies. A coded content analysis allows researchers to measure what is qualitative in a standardized fashion: characteristics were coded as traditionally masculine or feminine according to pre-existing standards in the literature, and all characteristics were measured for both the prince and princesses of the movies, unless otherwise noted. A selection of masculine characteristics for the study are as follows:

wants to explore, assertive, unemotional, independent, athletic, engaging in intellectual activity, brave, and *leader*.

Feminine characteristics included:

Tends to physical appearance, physically weak, submissive, shows emotion, affectionate, nurturing, troublesome, fearful, and ashamed. Collapses crying. *Victim*.

The researchers also coded rescuing behavior, and hypothesized that rescuing actions would differ according to gender. Based on the lists above, which role would participate more in rescuing actions, even if their involvement in the film was minimal?

You guessed it.

You might counter this assertion of gender stereotypes in Disney movies with *Mulan* and *Pocahontas*, both depicting female characters in positions of power; however, the researchers carefully noted that while a few princesses participated in rescuing behavior, none did so without some sort of help from a prince (England 561). Overall, the movies depicted characters with a mix of both masculine and feminine characteristics, but the proportions of feminine to masculine for females, and vice versa for males, decreased over time, suggesting a trend toward more androgynous prince and princess, especially in the most recent films (England 562), though, especially in the earlier films, a princess exhibiting a masculine trait did so insofar as it supported traditional gender roles. Their example of this was as follows: if a princess was assertive, it often was to an animal or a child, i.e. to someone with less power, which would still place a woman in a submissive role. There were also some gendered characteristics that were not commonly interchangeable for genders: for example, the researchers noted that princesses gaining positions of power was the least commonly portrayed characteristic, and if women were more stereotypically masculine, a traditional role was upheld by the time of the plot resolution, often in the form of the pursuit of a romantic opportunity.

A greater rate of mixed messages for gender roles are characteristic of the Disney Princess Movies passage through time, which corresponds to the aforementioned diminishing gap between males and females regarding gender characteristics, though current films still uphold the traditional gender roles in some shape or fashion, often not as readily obvious as the movies made in the 1930's-50's. For example, the first film to show a princess interested in an intellectual pursuit, *Beauty and the Beast*, utilized Belle's love for reading as a tool of isolation in her village (England 564). *Mulan* and *Pocahontass* displayed strong women,

physically and emotionally, in leadership roles that required bravery and an adventurous spirit, though these traits were not emphasized in a positive way (England 564). While this evolution of feminine and masculine characteristics of the main characters of Disney movies may reflect a social revolution of gender roles, their mixed messages convolute supposed progress in the creation of children's movies clean of gender stereotypes. If exposure to the media influences a child's cognition on gender development, what are the implications of these mixed messages? If children are little gender detectives, it is likely that they are recruiting evidence from any possible source; if they are exposed to stimuli that place genders in a value hierarchy, evaluating masculinity over femininity, it is likely that they will similarly value one over the other.

But perhaps it is not the rejection of the female gender per se, but the rejection of the traditionally deemed feminine characteristic. Perhaps it is not even a rejection of the gendered characteristic, but of the mismatch of the "wrong" gendered characteristics manifested in the "wrong" biological sex. It is the rejection of the tearful man, the muscled woman, of gender ambiguous haircuts. It is in the rejection of failing to appropriately behave in a normatively sanctioned fashion. In the study of Disney movies and its common representation of gender characteristics, it is clear that masculine characteristics are seen as more advantageous than female characteristics. After all, who wants to be labeled as tearful and troublesome when they can choose to identify as a leader who is brave and powerful? Another issue with the hierarchy of gender attributes is that feminine characteristics that are advantageous drown in a sea of not so advantageous characteristics. When we focus on negative feminine stereotypes, it is easier to ignore the prosocial characteristics such as affection and nurture. Even characteristics that are more ambiguous value-wise, such as emotional, are tainted with negativity within this sort of hierarchy.

We must rethink gendered characteristics as a hierarchy of values: we know that identifying with certain gendered characteristics is conducive to human development, but negative associations with certain gendered characteristics is what leads to maladaptive behavior in individuals who are predisposed to exhibit particular sexualized characteristics, combined with the effect of environmental stimuli in shaping gender normative behavior and mentality. When we associate gender categories as feasible descriptors of human beings, or as deterministic of behavior, individuals who identify with a stigmatized social category, through an interaction of causes, are at a disadvantage.

In order to change the way we think about gender, then we must consider the ways in which gendered characteristics are presented in a value hierarchy, and how gender characteristics are often evaluated as primarily associated with one sex or the other. Gendered characteristics, while perhaps providing a useful prediction for behavior according to a particularly salient social category such as gender, cannot be seen as deterministic because it certainly is not: biological sex, while influencing behavior, does not determine it. Socially normative perceptions of appropriate gender behavior will not negate the countless number of men as homemaker and women as professionals. Men, women, and intersex individuals possess a range of both masculine and feminine characteristics. It is no longer feasible to associate gender characteristics, at least those within social boundaries, with biological sex. Biological sex cannot be divided up into two neat, dichotomous categories, as this understanding is misleading and ignores groups who do not fall into either category.

Instead it may be useful to see gender characteristics similarly to the way certain personality characteristics are evaluated: on a spectrum (Understanding Gender). Much like the widely accepted notion of extraversion and introversion as concepts understood in relation to one another, masculinity and femininity may be similarly understood.

Approaching gender attributes much like you would personality traits offers a number of advantages:

1. It distinguishes between the individual and generalizations across populations (or, excuse the pun: generalizations)
2. It discourages deterministic applications: biological sex, or other characteristics do not determine manifestations of gender characteristics. The reciprocal would also stand: gender performance, attributes, identity, etc. would not determine biological sex.
3. Promotes, rather than discourages, gender studies through the celebration of individual differences alongside the understanding of commonalities across populations.
4. Does not place more social value on one gender social construct over the other.

A particularly useful site, appropriately named *Gender Spectrum*, nicely presents the advantages of adopting a new perspective on gender:

Instead of the static, binary model produced through a solely physical understanding of gender, a far richer tapestry of biology, gender expression, and gender identity intersect in a multidimensional array of possibilities. Quite simply, the gender spectrum represents a more nuanced, and ultimately truly authentic model of human gender.

The appropriate, empirically supported way to approach gender is not as categories, but as a spectrum of characteristics with the male and female categories on opposite ends; it is

important to note that men and women certainly are not opposites per se, but the socially deemed categories are.

Even with this new perspective in mind, we cannot ignore the historical denigration of the feminine, alongside the powerful role of subconscious mechanisms that contribute to lingering inequalities in modern society. With our new perspective of gender, we are further equipped to enact social change, but in order to do so, we must consider the vessels that harbor implicit gender bias that remains prevalent in modern society. Following will be an evaluation of language as complicit in the manifestation of implicit bias that contributes to social inequalities. Even though implicit gender bias is powerful, we know that it is similarly malleable. The role of the subconscious in the current state of our gender inequalities is a powerful one; however, certain functions of the subconscious are not static over time. In fact, implicit bias may be *malleable* through cognitive restructuring (Staats). If we acknowledge its existence, and target the way in which it is reinforced, we are one step further in altering our own biased perceptions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rhetoric of Inequality

“You create someone in the way you speak to them; you mark them with your words.”¹⁶

We speak a loaded language. A word uttered is not fully encapsulated by its current meaning; just as humans have evolved, so have words. Their definitions are not static dictionary entries. They are a reflection of our time, of our society. So what does it *mean* for a language to be loaded? Well, to discover the meaning of my sentence, we can look at the meanings (in light of an appropriate context, of course) of its individual parts: its words.

We.

“We” can also mean *us*, according to context, so for simplicity’s sake we can say “we” means human beings in general.

Speak.

Say something. Vocal utterances.

A

¹⁶ This is a verbatim quote from my professor of Language in Society; he was explaining the study of language as a conduit marker of identity. What we say offers a presentation of how we see ourselves and how we see others.

It's an article, or for you linguistics experts, a modifier.

Loaded language.

...now this is where it gets interesting.

Language is an abstract concept. It is not something we can physically bounce, throw, or consume. Anything that describes it ought to treat it in such a way... as an abstract, complicated term that we can't quite put our finger on ... right?

Let's test this hypothesis. In what contexts is the word "loaded" appropriate? What are the things we can "load"?

A grocery basket. A 9 mm pistol. A baked potato.

I'm sure you can see that we cannot load language as we do a root vegetable, or firearm, though we recognize the function of this word "load" as an action verb often dealing with concrete actions. We deal with language, and concepts within it, as though it were concrete, in spite of evidence to the contrary. We speak of time as if it were something to be earned or spent (he *wasted* my time), arguments in terms of battle (I *annihilated* his argument), conversation as something to give or take (I *GOT* it, Mom!!).

We speak a loaded language.

This sentence nicely demonstrates the idea of a conduit metaphor: I spoke of language as though it were some sort of vessel capable of being filled or otherwise physically acted upon, a notion explored at great length by Lakoff & Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*. If you're anything like me, then you may be wondering: what else is buried within the folds of the words I speak? You may be just as convinced that language is loaded in other ways too. Language is like a well-worn backpack: you know, the kind that granola-bearing, stringy-haired hippie types brandish as they trek through some sort of obscure outdoor adventure spot. The words we commonly use are probably like the items floating on top of the main compartment, stashed in the little side pockets, tucked away in the those weird outer mesh pouches. Some words are like the crumbs that line the bottom, like the pair of headphones long-lost and reluctantly replaced: remnants of once useful things.

Meanings of words are similarly stashed away; those long lost definitions of common words we use everyday (think of the evolution of the word *gay*) may be seemingly irrelevant, like those lost items floating around the bottom of this metaphorical backpack that once served a purpose, but have now been replaced or rejected. These meanings, however, may not be so easily tucked away; some meanings are like a busted ballpoint pen, out of sight and out of mind, but its power ought not be underestimated; its ink may permeate the rest of the pack, even from its most obscure recesses.

There is power in language, in the words we speak; when we speak in a manner that isolates or oppresses a particular group of people, we are not only asserting our own identity and individual views on this particular group, but also asserting the group's identity within the greater social context. Language serves as a vessel of communication, and it is capable of being acted upon as well as acting upon those who use it. Language that incorporates favor

of one sex over the other asserts a social identity that not only accepts, but also *performs* inequalities according to biological sex, or gender identification.

The topic of lingering gender inequalities of modern-day society was introduced with an anecdote that exemplifies one of the many ways our enlightened society condones sexist behaviors. Specifically, this reiteration of inequalities gains its traction through language. Recall the seemingly innocuous opening: the phrase “man up.” What exactly does this mean? Can this phrase, even if uttered without the intention of bias, perform a sexist identity?

Much of the literature studying implicit sexism in language focuses on the danger of “gendered generics”: he, mankind, mailman, etc. as “exclusionary of women” as well as a reinforcer of the status quo of stereotypical gender performance (Chew 644). “Subtle sexism” in language can shape the way we perceive gender, as well as contribute to subtle sexism in other areas of our lives (Chew 646-647), in spite of common consensus that the intention of gendered generics is not intentionally exclusionary (Chew 648). Even the American Psychological Association has acknowledged potential dangers of using gender-specific language through its adoption of *Guidelines to Reduce Bias in Language* (APA 1994). I would argue that common euphemisms in today’s society, such as “man up,” belong to this category of “gendered generics”: the intention of the speaker is not to communicate blatant sexism, nor does it necessarily reflect blatant sexism, but these statements nonetheless reinforce gender stereotypes and reflect implicit bias all the same, though of a more covert nature.

As aforementioned, especially among millennials who are far more educated than any other generation (NPR), the new generation experiences a world vastly different from the world experienced by even our parents’ generations; and hopefully this will ring true for the next. Women are assuming more traditionally masculine roles and masculine characteristics

(Meier-Pesti, Penz 191), which poses a contradiction with implicit biases rooted in the traditional role of women in society. While roles of men and women during emerging adulthood are likely quite similar, especially in academic atmospheres, the influence of gender in early adulthood seems especially intensified: an adherence to seemingly antiquated gender roles increase during early adulthood, likely because it is the time of marriage and childbirth for the majority of the American population (Sigelman & Rider 392). Though the age of nuptials has increased over time, and more and more women join the workforce, traditional gender roles become most distinct from the age of 25 to 40: perhaps the role of parental imperative (Sigelman & Rider 392) explains the common modern adherence to traditional gender roles. Middle and late adulthood signify the time of less social stigma in the name of normative gendered behavior: men experience less pressure to be “breadwinners,” and become more focused on “religious contemplation and family relationships” (Sigelman & Rider 393). Women become more active in society, which is a reversal of roles in early adulthood. Sigelman and Rider, referencing Gutmann’s work on the men and women in later life, concisely describe the passage of gender influence on adulthood as follows: “in short then, the roles of men and women are fairly similar before marriage, maximally different during the child-rearing years, and similar again later” (393).

So attitudes toward gender roles seem to fluctuate across the lifespan, the middle adult phase cushioned by times of relative egalitarian status within society; emerging adulthood and middle to late adulthood signify times of relative equality in society. This relative “equality” may reflect a cognitive shift, at least explicitly (vs. implicit bias) in regarding women as competent to perform roles that were traditionally deemed as masculine, or within a man’s realm of acceptable behaviors. This shift in society may explain the cognitive dissonance in the case of gender roles in society, a war between the conscious

acknowledgment of equal rights and implicit bias as remnants of historical degradation of the female gender role and femininity.

This cognitive dissonance may be manifested in language; not always consciously identifiable or even intended, especially when the intended meaning is far removed from the meaning implied by sexist-laden language that remained as normative in spite of social changes in gendered rules. Due to great strides by women over the years, coupled with the adherence to gendered traditions of the past, a disconnect has developed between the mentality behind sexist language and blatant sexist prejudices. So it is likely, especially among the new generation, that a comment such as “man up” pointed at a woman is not intended as an insult, or an argument of a gender hierarchy by the speaker, but the words reflect these sentiments all the same. It is not necessary for someone to intend to insult in order for its target to be insulted (Neu 7). It is not necessary for the insult of biased language to be intentional for the perpetuation of lingering inequalities.

Perhaps the intention is to treat gendered language as simply metaphor, related to its original meaning (Lakoff 63), with its intended meaning as a call to “toughen up” or, according to the top definition of “man up” on Urban Dictionary¹⁷, “to fulfill your responsibilities as a man, despite your insecurities and constant ability to place yourself in embarrassing and un-manly scenarios.” Phrases like these may now serve as an ill-phrased invitation into the world of manliness; after all, these phrases tend to be directed at

¹⁷ Unconventional source for a definition, this website is nonetheless reflective of social consensus of over seven million definitions agreed upon through crowdsourcing by the Internet community. Crowdsourcing is defined by Enrique Estellés-Arolas and Fernando González Ladrón-de-Guevara as “a type of participative online activity in which an individual, an institution, a non-profit organization, or company proposes to a group of individuals of varying knowledge, heterogeneity, and number, via a flexible open call, the voluntary undertaking of a task. The undertaking of the task, of variable complexity and modularity, and in which the crowd should participate bringing their work, money, knowledge and/or experience, always entails mutual benefit. The user will receive the satisfaction of a given type of need, be it economic, social recognition, self-esteem, or the development of individual skills, while the crowdsourcer will obtain and utilize to their advantage that which the user has brought to the venture, whose form will depend on the type of activity undertaken.”

individuals who are not performing “up to snuff” regardless of biological or self-identified gender.

Moving past the somewhat fruitless attempt to peer into the mind of an individual who would use such sexualized speak, the main point is that times have certainly changed, but our sexualized language has not quite caught up. Our language has been riddled with sexist innuendo since ancient times, so it is a tough habit to break; however, we must because our continued acceptance of this linguistic pattern, regardless of intention, is a social and cultural concern that may have far-reaching implications. We have already considered the power of priming, and the power of our subconscious in light of behavior. A society that tolerates sexist language is a society that *reinforces* sexist language. In the case of sexualized speech, the history of gender inequality, coupled with its lingering, but seemingly inconsequential, effects on the modern-day has not neutralized the sting of sexism. The perceived distance does not provide a protective measure from offense; just as teasing is often defended by the lack of intentionality, meant with no harm, (Neu 85), a sexualized phrase with very real roots in social injustice can deliver a punch not limited to conscious intention to insult (Neu 85). These insults tend to have a common theme of the denigration of the feminine role, of the characteristics associated with normative behavior for a woman, and her worth and status as feasible only in relation to her father’s, husband’s, or lover’s position (Lakoff 62). The language of honor, usually exchanged among men, is associated with the “denigration and subjugation of... women,” which refers to customs far back to ancient times and even extend to modern America (Neu 43-44). Status of the genders is evident in the language in which they are described (Lakoff 62). The linguistic denigration of women has been a hallmark of history, shaping the way in which we understand and study gender. Society influences our language; language influences our society.

A multitude of social influences contribute to an individual's speech patterns, an intersectional perspective, which subsequently influence the communicative behavior of the social groups in which they interact: individuals act on the groups in which they belong, and the group acts on the individual. People tend to linguistically accommodate according to characteristics of the social group in which they identify, as well as the group in which they are interacting (Zucker).

So yes, the social perspective on gender factors into many different aspects of personal identity; social identity, which tends to orient to others based on similar social identities (Giles 276), is largely comprised of the expression of normative gender characteristics. We are simultaneously peering into mirrored depictions of ourselves, as well as offering a reflection of others: communication accommodation occurs through our language, both vocal and physical. Language plays a functional role in the formation and expression of identity, and as we have seen, linguistic markers may indicate certain characteristics of its speaker.

Language contributes to our identities; however, we are helpers in preserving the identities asserted by others. We accommodate to others while they are accommodating to us when we communicate: a basic tenant of communication accommodation theory that theorizes why our speech patterns are largely influenced by external factors. It also follows from communication accommodation theory that certain group memberships are more salient than others, especially in light of general tendencies of American society as a whole (Zucker). For example, people do not prefer membership of the group known as *criminals*, whereas membership of the social group of an *academic* may be individually favored, as well as favored by society in general. In general, there are places in which certain speech is

acceptable, as well as certain people with whom certain conversational styles are deemed most appropriate.

For example, my personal characteristics predispose me to belong to certain social groups: Southern young adult Caucasian female with southern, young adult, Caucasian, and feminine communication tendencies. Some of the habits that I developed are entirely appropriate from my perspective, but incredibly inappropriate from perspectives that differ from my background. I was born in the south, raised by southern parents, a member of southern Baptist churches that were filled with “sirs” and “ma’am’s” and “brother Johns” instead of Pastors. Growing up, my parents did not acknowledge any utterance on my part that was not punctuated with this gesture of respect. Much to my dismay, upon entry to college and interactions with people who did not identify with my social group of a southern-raised young lady, my habit of referring to my “elders” as “sirs” and “ma’ams” was nothing short of disrespect, condescension, a rude and unnecessary reminder of one’s age. My southern identity, which I was expressing through language, was increasing linguistic distance between individuals and myself who were not white, southern, 21, and female.

So when sexualized language is continually accepted in society, roles are further communicated. When the bias in sayings such as “man up” are uttered, in spite of intention, the identity of the speaker is communicated as well as the notion that the feminine role is weak; the speaker is attesting to a hierarchy of gender, and a bias that the genders are to be treated accordingly. Due to the fact that we are a social race, group members must also interact with members of other groups. We all assert personal identity, acknowledge the identity others are presenting to us, all the while engaging in linguistic accommodations whenever we communicate with others; an interaction that legitimizes sexualized speak.

So here is a way in which we learn, through language and social interaction, to live in this world and be accepted by it, and to create a gender identity that is less salient than another is to place inherent disadvantage on any individual who identifies with the less preferred identity. We can choose to enhance or diminish differences between individuals from differing social groups, as there is subjectivity in accommodation: we tend to respond to our beliefs on how another person is speaking as opposed to how they are actually speaking. Our beliefs, or perhaps our own biases, shape social interaction. The way we think of others influences them.¹⁸

¹⁸ ...especially in uneven power dynamics. Accommodation tends to go in the direction of individuals who identify with groups that hold the least social power within a given interaction. (Giles 281)

CHAPTER SIX

Socialization of Inequality Through Language

Heidi Holland in response to a particularly grating comment by Scoop Rosenbaum, the misogynist love interest for Wasserstein's *Heidi Chronicles*: "Actually, I was wondering what mothers teach their sons that they never bother to tell their daughters."

We refer to gender and its associated characteristics through language: our speech, writings, and other methods of communication. Language formation and identity plays a key role in lifespan human development, and plays an integral role in shaping our perspective; specifically, for our purposes, we will focus on how our perspective on gender promotes maladaptive, sexist views, and how these views may reflect our environments. Language is a key way in which we form our own perceptions, and language is influenced by the context in which it is performed.

The research literature, across multiple disciplines, would point to linguistic strategy within the context of acquisition as an important formative factor in child development. A study on three communities of varying culture and socio-economic status similarly connected the style of speech and teaching strategies by parents and how these styles influence not only their children's success in school, but also their early linguistic speech patterns (Heath). The influence of "ways of taking," or ways in which children gather knowledge from their environments and learn from literacy events such as reading a book or engaging in interverbal communication with caregivers, is not limited to childhood (Heath 49, 74). Its influence permeates across the lifespan. The findings implicate society, or the

culture in which one identifies, resides, or is born into, as influential in the speech patterns of children *and* parents.

Another study on the influence of teaching style and interactions among parents and adolescents revealed that speech patterns in children often reflect those of their parents, a phenomenon not too surprising to the average person; however, with this finding comes many consequences for every day life. The words parents utilize, as well as the manner in which they utilize them, and personal biases they hold, can potentially influence multiple facets of child development. If parents hold stereotypical beliefs about normative gender behavior, interests, and abilities, then those beliefs will likely be apparent in the words they use. Those words will then influence the beliefs of whomever they come into contact; namely, their children.

In light of gender gaps in careers dealing with mathematics and hard sciences, researchers Tenenbaum and Leaper sought to uncover aspects of socialization that facilitate the perpetuation of gender inequities. Their population of interest was parents and children, and they studied how parental beliefs and communication influenced their children's beliefs in their own scientific ability and interest in science as a subject of study. Specifically, Tenenbaum and Leaper found that in their experimental design, parents tended to teach scientific tasks in a gender-typed fashion and make gender-stereotypic attributions, which reflected the general tendency for parents to associate science with disinterest for girls, as opposed to a favorable topic for boys. Analyzing the language the parents utilized in interactions with their children revealed the tendency to use less "cognitively demanding speech" with their girls than with their boys (Tenenbaum 31): speech that includes specific scientific terms such as "surface tension" or "viscosity."

You may be thinking that the parent-child relationship is not a one-way street: the parent certainly influences the child, but doesn't the child influence the parent as well? This assertion certainly is not misguided; however, Tenenbaum was careful to note that differential treatment occurred despite the fact that there were no significant differences between genders in scientific interest, grades on the scientific tasks, nor in the children's self-reports of self-efficacy in science. The data would suggest that the parents' beliefs and attitudes on gender in academia are associated with the treatment of their children, as well as with how they communicate with them.

Lingual markers in communication are incredibly influential in a child's development, with the potential to influence a child's outcomes when the child grows into an adult. The implications of this finding may not be limited to the discussion of parent-child interactions in the context of scientific interest and achievement, nor limited to a discussion on the way parent-child interactions influence school achievement and the ways in which children learn to recruit knowledge from their environments. To ignore the subtle nature of sexism in society, coupled with the socialization of biases through language, is to ignore the reciprocal relationship between language and society. These characteristics of language, within the context of gender inequalities, necessitate the careful consideration of the words we speak.

CONCLUSION

“Global warming isn't real because I was cold today!

Also, great news: world hunger is over because I just ate.”

Stephen Colbert

Back to our original question: have we achieved gender equality? After exposure to the many mechanisms of implicit sexism in our enlightened society, a natural follow-up to this question of achieving gender equality would most likely be whether or not it's even possible: Is achieving gender equality a reasonable, achievable, feasible goal?

Allow me to borrow a medical approach for this movement to abolish lingering sexism in society. If we can see sexism as a disease, metaphorically so, we can look at working for gender equality as working for a cure of sexism; however, inherent in this metaphor of a “cure” is the idea of gender equality as a feasible end to be attained, and this medical approach to treating lingering gender inequalities would attack the very source of the disease. This approach would be concerned with what is causing this disease, and what can be done to fight it. With sufficient “treatments,” through social movements, institutional changes and the like, our society would no longer be afflicted with the condition (sexism). Another potential approach is not as optimistic, as some diseases cannot be cured, which corresponds to replying to the question of achieving gender equality with a resounding “no”. The goal for this route would not be to achieve gender equality, but to alleviate the effects of sexism.

Regardless of the answer to the question of the cure vs. treatment approach to disease, attempts are made to improve an individual's health-related quality of life. Similarly,

whether or not the endpoint of a “cured” society is attainable ought not be a factor that justifies attempting to attain it, or justifies not attempting to improve the quality of life of those who are afflicted; those who live in an enlightened sexist society.

Recall our definition of gender equality: the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys (OSAGI). Working toward this goal, attainable or not, requires the consideration of factors that are conducive to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities across genders; maybe these outcomes will be realized through formulating a different question, one that addresses this call for male, female, and intersex individuals to enjoy equal opportunity. We may be able to formulate a perspective that helps us figure out how to not evaluate others based on their sex or gender, or associates success with a certain career outcome, life goal, or financial attainment. A perspective that reflects a society that not only tolerates, but also encourages the individual’s freedom to choose as well as the freedom of non-contingent opportunity. A society in which an individual’s actual and realized identity, not outside perceptions of identity, shapes the opportunities a man or woman or intersex individual is granted. A society in which the opportunities that an individual has access to is directly related to personal identity, not what is expected by normative standards, but by personal achievement, preferences, and qualifications. A society in which biological sex is irrelevant other than in the context of physical health and its relationship with gender characteristics. A society that celebrates opportunity to pursue happiness.

Perhaps gender equality cannot be evaluated as a specific end to be attained, which implies that there is a specific means to attain it, but evaluated through the integration of overarching goals that promote the pursuit of gender equality across a range of approaches, as an “integral part of interventions in all areas of societal development” (Gender

Mainstreaming: Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality). For this reason, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women contend that the state of pervading gender inequality must be approached through a strategic approach, as opposed to utilizing specific means to attain a specific goal. This strategy is referred to as gender mainstreaming, which ensures that “gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects” (OSAGI). This approach is intended to fight against sexism at all levels: research, legislation, developments in policy, as well as microlevel instances in which sex discrimination prevents equal participation and rights of the genders. This approach considers “policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively” (Gender Mainstreaming: Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality). These strategies call attention to deficits in organizations, structures, procedures, and cultures that harbor mechanisms of implicit sexism. This approach was adopted for the work of the United Nations as a global policy for the Millennium Declaration goals (Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview 28).

Gender mainstreaming is a radical change in perspective that acknowledges the need of change at all levels of society: “changes in attitudes and relationships, changes in institutions and legal frameworks, changes in economic institutions, and changes in political decision-making structures” (Gender Mainstreaming, an Overview 1). This call for change requires an intentional effort to enact global change; similarly, for the sake of enacting change in modern America, we must acknowledge the need for change across all levels of society, including our own attitudes on gender. This approach is multifaceted, so measurement of progress from this macro standpoint will similarly be tricky. Some

standardized measures, such as the United Nation's Gender Inequality Index, Social Watch Gender Equity Index, World Economic Forum Global Gender Pay Gap Index, look at gender through the lens of employment, incomes, education, women in decision-making, demographics, health, and poverty as indicators of gender equality, or lack thereof. These measures are formal and objective, ways to evaluate how society has changed to incorporate a more equal perspective on gender. Somewhat akin to a yardstick of gender equality that measures widespread indicators of lingering inequalities.

However, there are other indicators of inequalities, symptoms of a sexist society that do not necessarily need to be empirically measured to be apparent; casual indicators of sexism that are experienced by the individual, not necessarily reflected by equal representation of men and women in universities, a particular career, or other measures that evaluate the gap between men and women. Symptoms that cannot be wholly expressed through a statistic or research measure may reflect normative practices of the people who make up society. These considerations include the perception and treatment of femininity in the workforce, sexist euphemisms such as "man up", or the prevalence and social sanctions, or lack thereof, on street calls directed at women. The difference in the way moms and dads talk to boys and girls differently about science, or the problem with Disney princesses achieving their goals insofar as they uphold a traditional gender perspective.

Perhaps progress will be most evident to the common person when female politicians do not have to dodge questions about their wardrobes, grandchildren, or menstrual cycles. When notable female CEOs do not make blanket claims against a woman as a competent presidential candidate. When a household that is run by a stay at home dad and bread-winning mom is not seen as strange or unnatural. When feminism is no longer seen as embedded, already accomplished, or as an ugly word for ugly women and lesbians.

When we no longer point to our female bosses or educators or scientists as “proof” of the abolishment of sexism, yet she is objectified, disrespected, and subtly discriminated against. When the potential issues that gender may present us are not ignored or maintained through implicit mechanisms; when they are openly addressed, and the fight against them is openly endorsed. When we are intentional with how we talk about gender, and can look around us and see how far we have come as well as how far we have yet to go.

So how do we work to alleviate gender inequalities? We change the way we talk about gender, and we talk about it with empirical evidence as our guide (Dreger 262-262). Intermarriage of social activism and academia, specifically empirical research, will provide us with the lens of an informed, impassioned perspective with hopes of dismantling harmful norms of gender, from an institutional and individual perspective, that perpetuate lingering gender inequalities. The mark of a true altruistic perspective will empower the marginalized and inform the privileged not only on how to shrink the gap, but also explain why doing so is of utmost importance. The narrative of this alternative perspective on gender must be amended to be simultaneously generalizable and individualistic, applicable to the masses, but not deterministic of the individual.

To forge on with our current dichotomized understanding of gender is to further isolate and silence groups that do not fall into the categories of the general population’s understanding of gender. Whenever we fail to acknowledge the barriers that prevent people from working toward their own happiness, we have failed to honor them as human beings. The extent to which we change the way people think about gender corresponds to the change in the way we talk about it. These changes will then influence our thoughts and behavior, transforming modern American society so that groups historically denigrated by the current understanding of gender are empowered to change their own landscapes.

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