Images of Women

Chapter 3

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Chapter Outline

Words Can Never Hurt Me?

Worth a Thousand Words: Media Images

Stereotypes about Women and Men

The Impact of Stereotypes

Making a Difference

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LANGUAGE ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN, 1

Linguistic sexism: inequitable treatment of women and men that is built into everyday language
- Gender-marked terms: assign gender attributes with male as normative and trivialize women

People equals male bias: assumption that the unknown subject being discussed is a male

Animal equals male bias: mostly use masculine pronouns and show a bias by referring to animals as male

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LANGUAGE ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN, 2

Slang

- Slang referring to women is more likely to have sexual meaning
- Slang frequently objectifies and dehumanizes women by reducing them to only body parts, to be used by heterosexual males for pleasure
- Slang can be extremely sexist
  - For example, women often are referred to as animals
    - Similar terms for men are far less common

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Gender Marked

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Female Athletes

- ***Gender marked:*** use of gender-influenced terms such as "basketball" and "women's basketball" to refer or distinguish between men's and women's sports
  - Underlying message: Men's basketball is the <u>norm</u> while women's is the *variation*
  - Women's **athletic** ***achievements*** *are often* described in *gender-typical* and *trivializing* ways

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MEDIA IMAGES

Representation of Women and Men

- Women are *underrepresented* in popular media
- Women make up around 51 percent of the population
- Women have averaged only about 30 percent of speaking roles in the 100 top earning movies each year for every year since 2007 (Women's Media Center, 2015)
- Women are underrepresented in prime-time network commercials for all products except health and beauty items (Ganahl et al., 2003)
- Women and girls are underrepresented in comics (LaRossa et al., 2001)

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FACE-ISM and Sexual Objectification, 1

Face-ism: proportion of overall image devoted to face (Archer, et al., 1983)

Facial prominence in published images is usually higher for men than women

Face-ism index favored:

- Men over women
- European Americans over African American people
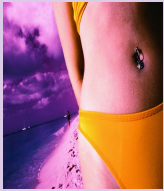 - Black women had the lowest face-ism index of all (Zuckerman and Kieffer, 1994)

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FACE-ISM and Sexual Objectification, 2

Sexual Objectification: Women are reduced to their body parts
- It is universal across cultures to have more female than male nudity (Nelson and Paek, 2005, 2008)
- Media and video games represent women unrealistically

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Idealization and Distortion of Women

Media creates idealized *Standards of Feminine Beauty*
- In the United States, dominant cultural standards work to idealize women with bigger breasts, thinner arms, and smaller waists (Borland, 2008)
- Digital technology allows radical alteration and complete fabrication of images of women

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Women's Body Image, 1

Body image: includes both the mental picture one has of one's appearance and the associated feelings about the size, shape, and attractiveness of one's body (Dorian and Garfinkel, 2002)

- Gender differences in body image
  - Attributed to the impact of idealized beauty images on women
- Most of the research on the impact of media images focuses only on white female college students

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Women's Body Image, 2

Social comparison*:* idealized beauty images make women feel bad as their own appearance suffers by comparison (Want, 2009)

- Beauty images are often accompanied by messages that relentlessly remind women that attractiveness is central to femininity
- Impact on different women varies based on factors like their race
- Globalization created by Western media images has led to worldwide increase in women's body dissatisfaction

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Women's Body Image, 3

Self-objectification: girls and women internalizing an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves

- Involves habitual and chronic preoccupation with self-surveillance that disrupts a woman's connection to her subjective experiences and divides her attention
- Continual body monitoring creates a sort of splitting of self between the subjective self and the self as object
  - Claims cognitive resources and interrupts thinking with feelings about appearance concern

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Women's Body Image, 4

Objectification theory: States that in a sexually objectifying culture, girls and women learn to "internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves" (Frederickson and Roberts, 1997)

- Negative psychological and social consequences for girls and, later, for women
- Divides attention between self-surveillance and other mental tasks

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INVISIBLE WOMEN, 1

Women of Color
- Asian American, Latina, Black or African American and Native American are underrepresented, while White women are overrepresented (Covert and Dixon, 2008)

Older Women
- Media invisibility and underrepresentation increase with age for women
- Negative stereotypes prevail for older women far more than for older men (Kessler et al., 2004)

Photo courtesy of Michelle R. Kaufman.

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INVISIBLE WOMEN, 2

Bigger Women
- Most images are of thin women
- Overweight women are presented as *tokens, generally* reinforcing negative stereotypes

Lower-Income Women
- Rarely represented on T V (Bullock et al., 2001)
- African American women are overrepresented in the media in discourse about welfare reform

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INVISIBLE WOMEN, 3

Women's Voices of Authority

- Underrepresented as responsible citizens and experts
- Focus remains on appearance, family, or bodies versus ideas or statements (Foreit et al., 1980)

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STEREOTYPES ABOUT WOMEN AND MEN

Stereotypes: theories that people carry around in their heads about how members of a particular group think, look, and behave, and how these attributes are linked

Schema: mental framework that guides people as they experience the world around them

Gender Stereotypes: networks of related beliefs that reflect the "common wisdom" about women and men

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CONTENT OF GENDER STEREOTYPES, 1

Physical characteristics: first thing perceived when meeting another person
- Women are seen as dainty, soft, and graceful
- Men are seen as tall, strong, and sturdy

Personality traits: individual characteristics of people
- Women are seen as **affective** and **communal,** which are concerned with feelings and other people
- Men are seen as **instrumental** and **agentic,** which are concerned with being active agents and effective "doers"
  - Dimensions of gender stereotypes were first found nearly 50 years ago (Broverman et al., 1972) and have been measured periodically over the years (Spence and Buckner, 2000)

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CONTENT OF GENDER STEREOTYPES, 2

Role stereotypes: behaviors and roles attributed to gender

- Women: housewife slash mother, sexy woman, athletic woman, and career woman
- Men: blue-collar worker, athletic, macho, and businessman

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OCCUPATIONAL STEREOTYPES

Based on a study conducted in 1975 and again in 1993, it was found that most jobs were perceived as gender-typed, not gender-neutral (Beggs and Doolittle, 1993)

Children learn occupational stereotypes by about the age of 6 to 8, and this knowledge shapes their preferences about future careers from an early age (Adachi, 2013)

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SEXUALITY STEREOTYPES

Gender and sexuality are closely linked in most people's cognitive schemas

Lesbians are stereotyped as "butch" or "mannish," and gay men are stereotyped as effeminate (Blashill and Powlishta, 2009)

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Means of keeping women subordinated

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Race and Social Class Stereotypes

"**Typical**" women and men are perceived to be white and middle-class (Weitz and Gordon, 1993)

Researchers found that the typical American woman was labeled intelligent, materialistic, and sensitive, similar to stereotypes of White women

Typical Black women were seen as loud, talkative, and aggressive, which are negative stereotypes
- Stereotypes about race and gender intersect for African American women

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Media Stereotypes of Black Women

Images of Black or African American women are biased in **racist and sexist** ways
- **Mammy**: the happy slave whose huge breasts and perpetual smile symbolize her as a nurturer, while her dark complexion, bandana-covered hair, broad features, and fat body mark her as asexual
- **Jezebel**: the evil black woman portrayed as immoral, seductive, and promiscuous
- **Sapphire**: the domineering, aggressive, strong, unfeminine woman; often portrayed as a tongue-lashing nag who bullies and drives men away

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ARE STEREOTYPES ACCURATE?

Stereotypes, to some extent, reflect the social world, and some hold a **kernel of truth** (Jussim et al., 2009)

Stereotypes function as effective cognitive shortcuts when they are somewhat anchored in reality

Stereotypes are hard to change
- Stereotypes influence the amount and kind of information that the individual takes in

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Impacts of Stereotypes, 1

Gender schema: people may come to believe that the attributes of their gender stereotypes are true expressions of their identity

Stereotype threat: when people know a negative group stereotype about their abilities, the pressure caused by fear of confirming the stereotype can interfere with performance

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Impacts of Stereotypes, 2

Self-fulfilling prophecies: Consensus about the way things are and the way they should be
• Can be **descriptive** and **prescriptive** stereotypes

Prescriptive Stereotypes: prescribe how we think others *should* look, think, or behave

People with more power engage in stereotyping of people with less power (Keltner et al., 2003)

Stereotypes can prime sexist behavior, such as sexual harassment or sex discrimination

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Transforming Language
• *Feminist language reform:* efforts to eliminate gender bias in the structure, content, and usage of language and to provide nonsexist alternatives (Pauwels, 1998)
  • Modified old language and created new language

Challenging Objectification of Women or Girls
• Well-informed consumers have to use their voices and dollars to educate the people producing the images, the products, and the services that rely far too much on objectification of women
• Doctor Jean Kilbourne: known for her lectures and advocacy work around how women are portrayed in the media

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