Sexism and Gender Stereotypes

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What is Gender Bias?

**Gender bias** is prejudice or discrimination based on gender, or conditions or that support gender stereotypes of social roles (Baslow, 1992).

Gender bias is not just an individual attitude, but is built into many societal cultures (Puri, 2011, para. 4).

The term *gender bias* is most often used in relation to discrimination against women, but men can be discriminated against as well.

Gender bias is also known as sexism, gender discrimination or sex discrimination.

Gender bias is harmful to men and women because stereotypes are not always true and having a false view of either gender is not fair (Lips, 2005).
Gender Biases

- Gender biases not only describe stereotyped characteristics of men and women, but they also set standards for how men and women should think and behave (Brewer, 2012).

- Members of either sex who do not follow gender stereotypes are often punished. For example, assertive women are called "bitches," and men who lack physical strength are seen as "wimps“ (Safe and Respectful Relationships for All, n.d).
Four Examples of Gender Stereotypes

1. Personality traits — Women are often expected to be passive and submissive, while men are usually expected to be self-confident and aggressive.

2. Domestic behaviors — Caring for children is often considered best done by women, while household repairs are often considered best done by men.

3. Occupations — Until very recently most nurses and secretaries were usually women, and most doctors and construction workers were usually men.

4. Physical appearance — Women are expected to be small and graceful, while men are expected to be tall and broad-shouldered (Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc., 2012).
Sexist Attitudes

- A sexist attitude suggests people can be understood or judged by characteristics of the group an individual belongs to such as men or women (Southern Adelaide Health Services, 2004).
- *Please note: It is assumed that everyone fits into the category of male or female and does not take into account people who identify as neither or both.*
Common Male Stereotypes

- All men enjoy working on cars
- Men are not nurses, they are doctors
- Men do "dirty jobs" such as construction and mechanics; they are not secretaries, teachers, or cosmetologists
- Men do not do housework and they are not responsible for taking care of children
- Men play video games
- Men play sports
- Men enjoy outdoor activities such as camping, fishing, and hiking

- Men are in charge; they are always at the top
- As husbands, men tell their wives what to do
- Men are lazy and/or messy
- Men are good at math
- It is always men who work in science, engineering, and other technical fields
- Men do not cook, sew, or do crafts

Sources: Brewer (2012); Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc. (2012)
Common Female Stereotypes

- Women are supposed to have "clean jobs" such as secretaries, teachers, and librarians
- Women are nurses, not doctors
- Women are not as strong as men
- Women are supposed to make less money than men
- The best women are stay at home moms
- Women don’t need to go to college
- Women don’t play sports
- Women are not politicians
- Women are quieter than men and not meant to speak out
- Women are supposed to be submissive and do as they are told

- Women are supposed to cook and do housework
- Women are responsible for raising children
- Women do not have technical skills and are not good at "hands on" projects such as car repairs
- Women are meant to be the damsel in distress; never the hero
- Women are supposed to look pretty and be looked at
- Women love to sing and dance
- Women do not play video games
- Women are flirts
- Women are never in charge

Sources: Brewer (2012); Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc. (2012)
Example of Gender Bias

Women are often stereotyped as being weak and passive and would fail in a competitive work environment because they are not as tough as men. Women are only useful when they are cooking or cleaning.
Example of Gender Bias

Men are often stereotyped as dirty, loud, and unable to take care of themselves without a woman. This is also an untrue stereotype.
Occupational sexism

- Women still make less than their male counterparts (wage discrimination) and are segregated in female-dominated jobs, e.g., nurse, secretary.
- Women now earn about 72 cents for every dollar earned by men.
- Sex discrimination in employment refers to any discriminatory practices, statements, actions, based on a person's sex or gender that are present or occur in a place of employment (Diamant & Lee, 2002).
Gender Identity

- How an individual feels inside, like feeling masculine or feminine, is called **Gender Identity** (Chin, 2004).

- Sometimes people who are biologically male but feel that they were meant to be feminine. Likewise, sometimes people who are biologically female feel masculine (Chin, 2004).

- A person’s gender identity can be different from their biological sex. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with the person!
How Can I Challenge Gender Bias Stereotypes?

- There are ways to challenge these stereotypes to help everyone, no matter their gender or gender identity, feel equal.
  - **Point it out** — From magazines and television to film and the Internet, the media is filled with negative gender stereotypes. Sometimes these stereotypes are hard to see. Talk with friends and family members about the stereotypes you see and help others recognize how sexism and gender stereotypes can hurt all of us.
  - **Walk the talk** — Be a role model for your friends and family. Respect people regardless of their gender.
  - **Speak up** — If someone is making sexist jokes, challenge them.
  - **Give it a try** — If you want to do something that is not normally associated with your gender, think about whether you’ll be safe doing it. If you think you will, give it a try. People will learn from your example.
  - If you have been struggling with gender or gender identity, you’re not alone. It may help you to talk to a trusted parent, friend, family member, teacher, or professional counselor (Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc., 2012).
References


