

American Culture's Impact on Gender and
The Perpetuation of a Gender Binary

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Abstract

This thesis explores the origins of American culture's fixation on gender being a dichotomous concept. Through the analysis of previous research surrounding the subject of gender roles, expectations, and stereotypes, contributors to this restrictive mind frame as well as reinforcing agents were recognized. Historical trends have demonstrated the assignment of clear and separate tasks to the genders, which in turn created differentiated experiences and opportunities presented to each gender. Facilitated by the historical basis, American culture emulated similar patterns that instilled inflexible conceptions about gender to the point where it has created a discriminate workplace environment. As a consequence of the culture, the American economy uses these gender ideals to increase revenue, disregarding of ethics. These factors combined produce negative effects on American citizens, regardless of how they identify. Comprehensively, the results have established that a rigid format of gender has the ability to limit the opportunities accessible to all genders.

Keywords: gender binary, gender origins, culture

Introduction

Background

One of the first things we do in American culture when a mother gives birth is ask whether the baby is a boy or a girl. For many, this is a normal question to ask. Knowing a person's gender helps others to know how to address the child, how to think about the child, and even how to treat the child. *The Psychology of Women* by Margaret W. Matlin (2012) defines gender as "the psychological characteristics and social categories that human culture creates," (p. 3). Gender is a way to organize the world around them and process thoughts about the things they see. American culture is based around a rigid gender binary that permeates all aspects of life. There are some instances where knowing one's gender is important, such as medical records because treatment and approach can alter depending on someone's gender. But more often than not, Americans experience unnecessary gendering: toys, clothes, toiletries, and even separated bathrooms. These aspects, and many more, are objects that do not need to be gendered, but they are because that is what our culture inherently accepts and perpetuates.

The perpetual yet subconscious focus on gender impacts the behavior of the people ascribing to American culture. Boys and girls from a very young age are taught from their parents and through observation what each respective gender is expected to be like. Boys are taught to be strong, independent, and aggressive while girls are taught to be caring, submissive, and emotional. These expectations lead to the creation of gender roles, which are behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics that are considered acceptable for a specific gender. Gender roles include the expectations previously mentioned but also extend beyond into what responsibilities a person assumes and even the occupation someone is to have. Typically, men are expected to work in order to provide for their families and hold jobs in the business, military, and

construction fields. On the other hand, women are expected to be homemakers, including cooking, cleaning the house, and taking care of the children if there are any. Some job types that are associated with women are nurses and secretaries, but if a woman has a job she is expected to simultaneously work and maintain her household. Even though these expectations cannot be lived up to by everyone, American culture insists on supporting these rigid roles.

In turn, this emphasis on gender roles facilitates the gender gap. This gap favors men and ultimately has women treated as second-class citizens. More men are in leadership positions than women, men are given more upper management positions compared to women, and there is an existing wage gap that pays men more than women for the same amount of work. The constant emphasis on gender is rarely noticed by the average American, yet it creates a number of societal disparities between men and women.

The Unknown

It has been established that gender is an important aspect of American culture, but it is uncertain as to why that is. Gender is not a necessary categorization; it is merely a social construct that is used to organize people in order to make sense of the world. Even so, gender is one of the foremost thoughts in our minds and it shapes everything we think and do. One of the first things we do when we look at a person is decipher what gender that person ascribes to, and if we cannot tell instantaneously we become frustrated because he or she does not fit into one of our preconceived categories. The emphasis on gender has reached an overwhelming degree; something as trivial as a social category has become an essential to understanding the world that it is creating delusion. Of course there are differences between males and females, but not to the extent that American culture is demonstrating. First and foremost, men and women are human; gender is only a minute aspect of who they are.

Thesis

Although it is known that gender is emphasized in American culture, it is still unknown as to why gender is so important. Thus, I propose American culture is so deeply rooted in a gender binary for three reasons. Firstly, gender segregation has been a part of American history since its foundation. The ways of life and culture of the past have had an impact on the ways of life and culture of today. Secondly, there are cultural aspects present today that reinforce the gender binary. From segregated public areas to differentiated gender expectations, the distinction between the genders is made quite clear. Finally, America's market economy preys on the preexisting gender binary and reinforces it. Many items for purchase are unnecessarily gendered and perpetuate rigidity in gender norms. Through examining these three aspects of our culture, perhaps it will become clearer why America is so dependent on gender.

The gender binary has been a part of American culture since its beginning. From the foundation of British culture in the colonies, and even further back to the foundation of human beings, this dichotomy has existed in order to organize information and lifestyle. In the earliest civilizations, there were hunters and there were gatherers. Men, having superior physical strength, were tasked with hunting live animals and providing for the women and the family. This left women to gather fruits as well as materials for fashioning shelter – the antiquated version of a homemaker. Life surrounded surviving, and each sex contributed their part in ensuring that it was possible. This theme persisted through time through the establishment of the British colonies in North America. Men still were expected to be providers and women were expected to be homemakers and to tend to men's every need. For instance, the reason why shirt buttons are on different sides for men's and women's clothing today is because women typically used to dress men. When facing a man to button his shirt, the woman would not have to adjust

which hand threaded the button through the hole. Once the colonies seceded from Britain, the gender binary remained a part of the colonist culture and underlying tones of it still exist in American culture because of it.

The dichotomy of gender is still apparent in the United States, and for this reason there are innumerable aspects of American culture that facilitate and reinforce it. Some of the main ones consist of having segregated public restrooms, women not being able to be shirtless in public, and parents being focused on what the sex of their child will be. In the vast majority of public places, men and women have designated separate restrooms. These bathrooms have virtually the same amenities, with the exception of one distinction: men's facilities have urinals where women's have diaper changing stations. This reinforces that it is the woman's responsibility to be the primary caretaker of the children. Another aspect of culture that emphasizes gender differences is the fact that women cannot go out in public shirtless. Breasts are overly sexualized in American culture, and women are not supposed to be sexual beings, so a woman exposing her chest would go against the cultural norms. Additionally, there is a large focus for parents to know what the gender of their baby is in utero. Knowing this information prior to birth gives parents the opportunity to socialize the child as one gender or the other immediately. These cultural aspects, among many others, keep the gender binary alive in the United States.

An enormous part of American culture is its market economy. Marketing specialists are using the preexisting gender dichotomy as a means to sell more products. This is why there are gender-segregated clothing and toy sections within stores. The items sold for boys usually consist of darker colors and exemplify toughness and hard work. On the other hand, items made for females are brighter, and often facilitate nurturance and kindness. These items in turn instill

children with their assigned gender expectations and they will feel pressured to assimilate to them, even if they do not agree. Additionally, products sold to women in many cases will be more expensive than their male counterparts, regardless of if they are essentially the same product. Adding a feminine fragrance to an otherwise mundane object will increase its cost largely. Marketers know the trends in buying habits between men and women, thus they target those trends in order to make more money. In the process, they end up perpetuating gender differences.

American culture, whether it is aware of it or not, revolves around the gender binary. It is a part of everyday life and affects everything we do as a culture. The emphasis on gender differentiation has been seen time and time again. Historically, the genders were served different functions which strengthened the dichotomy and laid down the foundation for a rigid viewpoint of gender. Culturally, the United States maintains several attributes and attitudes that facilitate and perpetuate the gender binary through segregation and differential treatment. Economically, the market targets the distinction between genders as a way to sell more products and generate more revenue. The history of this division feeds into today's culture, which then feeds into the economy; all of these aspects are interconnected. What is important to take away from examining the gender binary is that it punctuates that men and women are more different than they are similar. It poses that men are in opposition to women, though this is not the case. At their core, men and women are both human before anything else. It is societal constructs that have made gender categorization an essential part of culture and have brought forth an unnecessary need to separate the genders.

American Culture's Impact on Gender and the Perpetuation of a Gender Binary

Gender is a pervasive aspect of American culture and, as such, it permeates all functions of life and has since the United States' foundation. The construct of gender shaped human behavior in the past, and it continues to do so in the present. Historically, men and women were expected to behave differently because sex, one's biological makeup, was not differentiated from gender, or how one identifies oneself. This distinction has dictated human behavior for centuries and created a foundation for an inflexible perception of gender. This rigidity has carried into current American culture, creating gendered expectations that effect not only how people are to live their lives but also the opportunities people have access to. As a result of these expectations, our market economy feeds off of the groundwork of culture and further perpetuates the dichotomy of gender. Advertisements target each gender separately with products that cater to gender roles and expectations, even if the product being sold is essentially the same. Additionally, advertisers target women differently than men based on typical spending patterns. Evidence found in each of these three categories demonstrates that gender differences are still very much expected.

Historical Evidence

Evolution

Long before American culture was established, men and women existed with a single purpose: to survive. Evolutionarily, males and females were allocated different roles in order to live and produce healthy offspring. For this reason, there is a basis for gender differentiation due to evolution. According to evolutionary theory, males and females look for specific attributes in a mate that will ultimately benefit their offspring. Males, having a longer reproductive lifespan and large quantities of sperm, are tasked with finding the healthiest-looking mate in order to best

ensure their genes are passed on for generations to come. Females, on the other hand, have a more limited reproductive life and a limited amount of eggs, and are therefore more invested in the offspring's survival. The female's main concern is finding a mate that will provide resources to her and the offspring throughout the pregnancy in addition to thereafter.

Though this view can be seen as animalistic, evolutionary theory remains applicable within the context of human life. Men, seeking fertile and healthy women, are most concerned with attractive physical characteristics when looking for a partner because physical attractiveness is associated with fertility, (March & Grieve, 2014). This facet of evolutionary theory underscores the importance of beauty for women which then creates an environment that expects women to be beautiful, and if they are not they are not considered to be desirable. For women, the main factor is stability: will their desired partner be able to provide resources? In modern terms, women seek partners that are financially stable (March & Grieve, 2014). This element of the theory accentuates the notion that men are to be the providers of their families, a concept that persists in American culture today. In a study conducted by March and Grieve (2014), results found that women with more independent financial stability decreased their preference for a financially stable partner and increased their preference for a physically attractive partner. This demonstrates that when women have more opportunities to support themselves, they have more freedom in who to choose for a partner which is usually accompanied by a more egalitarian style of partnership. Regardless of whether present life is vastly different from the lives of our ancestors, the same types of patterns are demonstrated: men are expected to provide for women and women are expected to be physically attractive.

American History

Evolution still has an impact on current American culture, but more recent historical events have had just as much effect on the United States. Antler (2015, p. 19) states that “for women...historically based difference led to behaviors distinguishable from the dominant group, impacting identities, determining histories, and demanding the attention of historians.” One of the most influential periods of time for the identity of the American woman was during World War II. During this time, the roles of American women were being altered in order to compensate for the men who were sent to fight. Women were sent into the workforce to do their part of the war effort, in addition to remaining homemakers; this shift caused women to become the providers for their own households (Hall, Orzada, & Lopez-Gydosh, 2015). This transfer of responsibility to women could have had a radical impact on American culture, altering how we view gender as a society, but it did not for one reason: the government would not allow it.

Despite the need for women to absorb the responsibilities of the men fighting, they were under the constant reminder that they were still second-class citizens and it was communicated in a myriad of ways. The government was certainly campaigning for women to join the work force and serve their country, but how they advertised this message conveyed that women working would come with conditional terms. First and foremost, it was stressed that women being in the workforce would only be temporary. This was referred to as a “war job,” and as soon as the troops returned women would be expected to give their job up for the men they had originally replaced (Hall et al., 2015). Any woman who did not follow this would be criticized for taking a job away from an unemployed man, a rightful breadwinner. Regardless of if the women were working the jobs men left behind or serving to aid the military, their efforts were perceived as standard so long as they knew it was only temporary.

Another message the women received from government workforce advertisements was the importance to maintain femininity. With women now taking over typically male roles, the government was concerned that women would lose sight of their true place in American culture: homemaking. This need to remain feminine further restricted what was thought to be permissible for women; it emulated that women needed to step up and do their duty for the war but only doing so as women in the most traditional sense possible. One of the most iconic advertisements of this era, Rosie the Riveter, was created to do just that. What most people see when looking at Rosie is a strong woman who is willing to work hard in order to serve her country, but what is often overlooked is that she is also portraying what was considered to be beautiful at the time. Rosie the Riveter is an example of what the American government wanted its women to be: steady and stunning all at once (Hall et al., 2015). To perpetuate this fierce femininity, the government fashioned new clothes for women. Some of the laborious jobs required more movement than skirts allowed for, thus pants were fashioned were women. But these pants were only meant to be worn while working if one was issued them, otherwise it was frowned upon for the lack of femininity. Additionally, women who worked in the military were fashioned uniforms that were made to show a woman's figure. This demonstrated to women that they could work and still be chic (Hall et al., 2015).

World War II had a definite impact on gender roles in America, but not as much as it could have. The government did all it could to do what it thought was best for the country at the time, but it could not have possibly understood the impact it had on engraining the importance of a gender dichotomy into our culture. By giving women only temporary positions within the workforce, it diminished women's ability to be self-sufficient by choice. It allowed women to live only one kind of life, and if a woman did not wish to live it then she would suffer the

consequences imposed on her by society. Additionally, by being preoccupied with keeping women feminine the notion that beauty is the most important facet of a woman was maintained, a facet that can still be seen in culture today. Through fear of too much change by society, the concept of a gender binary was further reinforced and embedded into American culture.

Cultural Evidence

Due to this historical foundation, American culture exemplifies gender differences in more ways than most comprehend. As previously mentioned in the introduction, our culture separates the gender in a myriad of ways. The most obvious is by unnecessarily gendering items such as basic items of clothing, generic toiletries, and toys. Many of these products perform the same function toward boys, men, girls, and women alike, thus their only true purpose is to reinforce gender stereotypes, gender roles, and gender differences. Another way this is demonstrated is in gender-segregated areas within the public domain, namely bathrooms. Using the bathroom is something all beings need to do; therefore it is unnecessary to have separated bathrooms. Additionally, creating just two types of bathrooms, for men and for women, leaves transgender, genderqueer, bigender, and any other individual that does not adhere to traditional gender definitions without a place they can comfortably use the bathroom. This kind of gender segregation can also be seen in room placement at universities because typically these institutions only allow for people of the same gender to cohabitate in on-campus housing. Enforcing such restrictions not only affects those who do not conform to binary gender, but it also forsakes the importance of acknowledging other demographics that can impact comfortableness while sharing a living space, such as race and sexual orientation. Blatant gender segregation is a needless aspect of our society that only limits its citizens, but this is only surface

level. There are deeply-rooted aspects of American culture that facilitate gender differences in attitudes, behaviors, and even opportunities.

The Impact of Gender Roles

Gender roles are certain expectations that people are meant to follow based on how they identify themselves. Though it appears that one has the decision of whether or not to act on preconceived gender roles, there are outside forces that make it difficult to go against the grain. One of these forces is employment opportunities. An analysis of sex segregation in housework done by Hook (2010) demonstrated that many factors concerning employment were correlated with which partner did which tasks in the home. Hook discusses that some companies have rigid full-time work structures that requires employees to work harder and longer hours. With the expectation for them to be the providers of the household, men have taken on such jobs to support their families. However, this impacts not only what household tasks men carry out, but also the tasks that women perform.

Hook (2010) states that there are two types of tasks in housework: time-flexible and time-inflexible. Time-flexible tasks are ones that are not as critical and can be put off until another time while time-inflexible tasks are those that must be done at a particular time in order to keep the household functioning. With men being at work, they are not tasked with nearly as many responsibilities within the home and are more likely to perform time-flexible tasks. This leaves women to be assigned the time-inflexible tasks, such as cooking, which in turn limits the time they have free for employment. Due to this women are more prone to attaining part-time work, limiting their economic freedom while reinforcing that their responsibility is first and foremost the home (Hook, 2010). Hook's analysis demonstrated that in situations where the woman works full-time, the man is more likely to spend time on household tasks. On the other hand, if the

woman is only works part-time, the man is less likely to spend time on such tasks. The interaction of gender roles and employment opportunities reinforces that men and women have different responsibilities, which can hinder women's advancement within the workforce and men's ability to bond with their children.

Another aspect of culture that gender expectations influence is regarding who has access to which resources. America currently faces a pay gap based on gender with women earning less than men for the same kind and same amount of work. A recent study conducted by Renno & Shutts (2015) was done to demonstrate giving tendencies within children based on gender. In the study, children between the ages of 3 and 5 were given poker chips to use as coins and were then taught how to distribute them. The participants were shown pictures of other children varying in race and gender and were allowed to distribute their coins among those children however they wanted. The results found that participants were more likely to give their coins to children that matched their own gender. The study states, "Children as young as 3 years of age gave more resources to...unfamiliar same-gender (vs. unfamiliar other-gender) children," (Renno & Shutts, 2015, p. 540). This study illustrates that people expect others that are similar to them to be more likely to act in prosocial ways toward them than people that are different. This applies to resource availability based on gender because there are more men than women in upper-management positions in the workforce. If people are more likely to give to others of the same gender, it makes sense that the men in charge of hiring others would be more likely to employ other men, enabling men to have better access to resources and women to be at a disadvantage when seeking employment. These prosocial expectations based on gender have an impact on the opportunities people have access to.

The Institutional Impact of Gender

As much as gender roles and expectations affect the opportunities one has access to, the very institutions that dictate our jobs, our education, and our lives truly embed the concept of gender inequality into American culture. One aspect that influences gender differences is access to parental leave. In Hook's (2010) analysis of sex segregation in housework, it is determined that having access to parental leave, for both men and women, has an impact on what household tasks each person performs which in turn impacts the opportunities one is provided. For women, maternity leave allows for access to resources before, during, and after pregnancy. Despite the many benefits, the fact that maternity leave is more common than paternity leave sends the message that it is more important for women to be at home with their children than men. Conversely, men who wish to take paternity leave may face complications. Since it is the norm for men to be the providers, employers may be reluctant to allow them parental leave. Hook discusses that men are caught between the expectation for them to provide for their families and the need of bonding with their children (Hook, 2010). Due to the connotations and inconsistencies of parental leave, gender differences in the workforce and in the home are reinforced.

While gender inequality is certainly present within the workforce realm, gender discrepancies are often also seen within academia. Institutional policies of colleges and universities have been noted to impact what people, regardless of if they are students, staff members, or employees, can achieve. A study conducted by Leslie, Cimpian, Meyer, & Freeland (2015) explored how expectations of intelligence affect gender distribution depending on one's academic discipline. The overall observation was that the more selective a discipline was, the fewer women there were in it. This trend is seen most heavily in the STEM fields, or fields

concerning natural sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics. These types of occupations typically require systemizing thought processes rather than empathizing ones, creating a stereotype threat for women attempting to enter STEM fields. Women are often stereotyped as being emotional and are believed to not have the ability to make sound decisions because of it. If women wanting to enter the STEM fields are aware of this stereotype, there is a chance for them to buy into it and be discouraged.

Within the study, there were several associations between the discipline's emphasis on an innate giftedness and women's presence within the discipline. The more a discipline valued raw talent, the more likely it was for that discipline to believe that women are not as suited for high-scholarly work as compared to men and were rated to be less welcoming to women.

Additionally, there were fewer female Ph.D's within fields that cherished giftedness.

Interestingly enough, the study found no evidence that fields that more women are involved in have weaker applicant pools (Leslie et al., 2015). If the applicant pools between the fields where women are underrepresented and the fields where they are present are comparable, it must be our culture's attitude toward gender differences spurring the discrepancy. It is this attitude that can not only cause unequal evaluations and employment between genders within institutions, but also deter women from wanting to take leadership within their fields (Chiaburu, Sawyer, Smith, Brown, & Harris, 2014).

Another way academic institutions can undermine gender equality is in a miniscule detail: their diversity statement. A diversity statement is articulated by institutions to combat minorities being undervalued and underrepresented as well as demonstrate how the organization is committed to facilitating equality. Despite this, some diversity statements can actually harm the prosperity of minorities within the institution merely by how it is phrased. A study conducted

by Wilton, Good, Moss-Racusin, & Sanchez (2015) examined the impact of the multicultural model of diversity statements versus the colorblindness model on performance based on race and gender. Both models have the same goal of reducing discrimination, but they do so using different approaches. The multicultural model focuses on valuing the diversity in each person and emphasizes inclusion of all cultures. On the other hand, the colorblindness model stresses what people have in common with one another and disregards differences. Results showed that the distinction between the two models had an impact on who thrived within the institution.

The study primarily found that the use of the colorblind message influenced the success of minorities negatively. When exposed to the colorblind diversity statement, participants expected more bias within the institution as compared to when they were exposed to the multicultural statement. Participants also expected there to be less diversity in gender in the colorblind message condition versus the multicultural condition (Wilton et al., 2015). These results could be due to the fact that colorblind diversity statements are rooted in assimilation to the norm, and the norm within the context of American culture is white males. The study additionally examined the interaction of race and gender when exposed to the different models of statements and found that the colorblind model was able to undermine women of color in performance-based tasks, but not men of color. Women of color often are one of the most affected groups within institutions because they are underprivileged in two dimensions. The combination of being a minority in both race and gender can inhibit their desire to be successful within their institutions (Wilton et al., 2015). For this reason, it is imperative for institutions to realize the impact they can make on their employees accomplishments. If they do not, underrepresented minorities will suffer. It is clear that what is expected of each gender creates a

division between men and women, but the institutions we rely on everyday only reinforce such expectations and can hinder the ability of some through policy.

Marketing Evidence

Due to the fact that American culture is oriented toward separating the genders, these gendered expectations and attitudes toward gender have an impact on our economy. In fact, advertisement companies prey on the fact that American consumers have bought into the notion of men and women being more distinct than they are similar. One of the most common gender stereotypes that is targeted within advertising is that women are more emotional and nurturing than men and therefore will be more susceptible to advertisements rooted in emotion appeal. In a study conducted by Kemp, Kennett-Hensel, & Kees (2013), the effect of emotion in persuasive appeals and its interaction with gender was examined. The study measured the willingness of each participant to engage in prosocial behavior depending on the type of advertisement viewed. There were two conditions: the sympathy condition and the pride condition. The sympathy condition used an advertisement that targeted need for prosocial behavior out of concern for others while the pride condition targeted need for prosocial behavior in order to feel fulfilled. Kemp et al. (2013) expected there to be gender differences within each condition.

The results found that the two conditions impacted men and women differently. Women and those who scored high on a femininity inventory exhibited the tendency to want to engage in prosocial behavior more often in the sympathy condition than in the pride condition. There is an expectation for women to be caring and nurturing, thus women were more likely to be prosocial when exposed to advertisements that emphasized concern for others (Kemp et al., 2013). Conversely, men and those who scored high on a masculinity inventory were more likely to demonstrate prosocial behavior in the pride condition than in the sympathy condition. The pride

condition shows participants an advertisement that focuses on feeling satisfied by engaging in prosocial behavior, hence men were more susceptible because it aligns with the typical male expectations in America. The helping behaviors that men partake in are usually more chivalric and require a degree of heroicism (Kemp et al., 2013). Advertisement companies that are aware of this gendered trend use it to manipulate their advertisements for the purpose of catering their products more towards one gender.

Advertisement companies that target men and women using gender stereotypes and expectations are actually using unethical tactics to increase profit. Women are especially at risk of being exposed to immoral advertising because of how they are perceived by those creating the ads. Within advertisement, women tend to be seen as less competent, are irrational, and are more naïve when making decisions as compared to men. For these reasons they are vulnerable and therefore are often targeted by companies (Cowart & Darke, 2014). Studies have demonstrated that companies take advantage of women in this way to the point where they are selling essentially the same product to women at a higher price than they are selling it to men. In a study conducted by Cowart & Darke (2014), it was found that females were more likely to be targeted by sales advertisements that were selling an inferior product, while males were not targeted to a significant degree. Gender expectations clearly have an impact on how products are advertised and this causes issues because men and women are not being treated as equal consumers. Using gender-oriented advertisements not only perpetuates the gender stereotypes that American culture already upholds, but it also leaves women at risk for higher costs of living and lesser satisfaction in the products they are offered.

Though consumers are among those who more are at risk to ascribe to the gender expectations presented in advertisements, those working for the advertising companies have also

been found to be susceptible. Research conducted by Zayer & Coleman (2015) surveyed the perception of advertising professionals' on the impact of how genders are portrayed. They discuss that advertisements are affected by the concept of "moral myopia," defined as a 'distortion of moral visions that prevents moral issues from coming into focus,' (Zayer & Coleman, 2015, p. 268). If advertising companies are not necessarily observing morality when creating new advertisements, their choices and strategies are commonly unethical. The interviews with these professionals highlighted concerns surrounding women in advertisement that are often brought to light in mainstream media, such as body image and women being seen as sensitive. They also stressed that men can be just as affected by advertisements as women. The professionals suggested that men feel pressured to exemplify more masculine behavior due to how other men are portrayed in advertisements. Society dictates that men are to be only allowed to express emotion through anger and that they are to be powerful, thus companies employ these stereotypes (Zayer & Coleman, 2015). Recognizing the effect of advertisements on not only women but also men is imperative to the shaping gender expectations.

Overall, advertisers are aware that gender is a social construct that is performed rather than being innate; it can only be real as long as people are performing their respective genders. With that knowledge, companies target stereotypical gender performances in order to increase revenue. In fact, most of the advertising professionals that were interviewed by Zayer & Coleman (2015) were aware of the unethical tactics used toward gender in advertisements. Some said that ascribing to gender stereotypes within advertisement allowed the professionals to ignore the fact that their content had potential to negatively affect their consumers. Others recognized the issues that came with feeding into gender stereotypes but also acknowledged that not using them could have an adverse impact on their career goals, and hence used gender stereotyping as

a business strategy (Zayer & Coleman, 2015). Not only are those dictating our economy aware of the views of gender our culture endorses, but they use it unethically for personal gain. These advertisements strengthen the attitudes and behaviors Americans have toward the genders and further facilitate the belief that gender is dichotomous.

Conclusion

In American culture, gender is seen as fact rather than a concept. It enforces a rigid view that a person is either a man or a woman with no exceptions. This particular outlook, especially within the context of the modern era, does not work because diversity in America has only increased with time. As far as gender is concerned, a plethora of terms have been coined within the last few decades in order to compensate for those who do not feel they fit into the gender dichotomy such as: transgender, gender nonconforming, gender fluid, bigender, and much more. With so much diversity within a single category, a binary approach to gender creates issues for those who do and do not ascribe to the dichotomy. My goal in doing this research was to attempt to find why the gender binary is as prevalent as it is in American culture. I researched this question through historical, cultural, and economical perspectives and found a great deal of support. Gender as an aspect of a person may not be as important on an individual basis, but it can have an immense impact in the grand scheme of things.

The idea of the gender dichotomy in America would not be as strong as it is without its historical foundation. From prehistoric times through recent historical events, the genders have been separated by distinct expectations. Evolutionarily, men and women are built for different tasks. Men, having more muscular strength than women, were expected to be the hunters in order to provide food for their kin. Women, on the other hand, were built to bear children and were tasked with caring for offspring as well as gathering various components for food and shelter. From an evolutionary standpoint, due to the fact that they were tasked with separate aspects of survival, men and women developed different schemas of what to value in a mate. As discussed by March & Grieve (2014), these patterns can be seen in whom people choose for partners even today. Men evolutionarily sought women who could produce healthy offspring, which then

facilitated an emphasis on beauty in women. Conversely, women sought men who would be able to provide their offspring resources, and thus today value men who are financially stable and will be a breadwinner. These tactics that were used for survival in a simpler time have created mating patterns within modern society and laid groundwork for differences in gender expectations.

Another critical era for gender in America was during World War II. This time period challenged traditional gender roles while simultaneously stressing the need for gender roles to remain the same. Women were called upon by the United States government to absorb the responsibilities of the men fighting overseas in addition to their homemaking. According to Hall, Orzada, & Lopez-Gydosh (2015), women could do their part to support the war effort in one of three ways: by continuing their work within the home, by volunteering their time, or by joining the workforce. Those who chose to join the workforce became providers to their own homes, causing a shift in gender roles. Despite their new obligations, American women were constantly reminded they were of second-class status to men. Not only were women reminded that these positions were only temporary but they were not allowed to lose their femininity due to the fact that they were taking on traditional male roles. The United States government wanted women to be everything because it needed their support, but as soon as the war was over people were to return to the status quo. Because the government was not prepared for such radicalism, this era was a missed opportunity to impact how America perceives gender roles.

Due to these historical establishments, a dichotomous understanding of gender persists in American culture. In fact, there are aspects of our culture that facilitate such thought processes. Many public sectors are segregated by gender, such as differentiated products and bathrooms. Having unnecessarily gendered items and places reinforces the gender binary as well as isolates anyone that does not identify their gender on a dichotomous basis. Unfortunately, this

exemplification of separating the genders is only surface level; there are ways in which American society reinforces gender differences through hidden attitudes and behaviors. Many aspects of employment in the United States fortify the stereotypical gender roles of men being the breadwinners and women taking care of the household. An analysis conducted by Hook (2010) demonstrated that rigid full-time work structures impact what tasks men and women each do within the household and which then affects the opportunities one has access to. Women are more likely to be tasked with time-inflexible chores while men often are tasked with time-flexible chores. Because of the time constraints enforced by time-inflexible tasks, women are more likely to work part-time, sending the message that women are expected to be more invested in their homes than in their work. Additionally, a study conducted by Renno & Shutts (2015) indicated that children are more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior toward others of their same gender. If this pattern of behavior persists through adulthood, there is a potential for women's opportunities to be limited. These investigations establish how attitudes and behavior about gender can influence employment opportunities.

Attitudes and behavior that support the gender dichotomy not only occur in everyday life, but within the workplace itself. The very institutions that uphold American society implicitly undermine gender equality. Hook's (2010) analysis discussed the importance of parental leave in establishing gender expectations. When women have more access to parental leave than men do, it indicates that the mother's role in parenting is more important than the father's and that it is not the responsibility of the father to care for the children first-hand. Research conducted by Leslie, Cimpian, Meyer, & Freeland (2015) explored the distribution of men and women within the STEM fields and found that women were at a disadvantage. Those within the STEM disciplines typically made assumptions that women were more emotional and therefore not

capable of being analytical. This attitude toward women leads to unequal treatment within the workplace and discourages women from pursuing leadership positions. Furthermore, a study conducted by Wilson, Good, Moss-Racusin, & Sanchez (2015) compared the impact of multicultural-oriented diversity statements versus colorblind-oriented diversity statements. They found that nearly across the board, using the colorblind model negatively impacted the performances of minority groups within the workforce. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that gender disparities are reinforced on the institutional level because it creates unequal opportunities amongst the genders.

Because the gender binary is so readily reinforced by American culture, it influences our economy, especially through advertisements. The media is constantly feeding information to the consumers of the United States about gender expectations through strategies tailored to target gender. Kemp, Kennett-Hensel, & Kees (2013) conducted a study that examined the impact of emotional appeal in advertisement based on gender. They found that women were more likely to demonstrate prosocial behavior based on concern for others while men were more likely to do the same out of the need to feel fulfilled. This iterates the media's role in gender expectations surrounding emotion. Cowart & Darke (2014) found that women are especially targeted by advertising companies because they are viewed to be less-competent consumers. Moreover, women are susceptible to be targets of more expensive and inferior products than those targeted at men. Those who work for advertising companies are very much aware of the impact they can have on both men and women with their content. Zayer & Coleman (2015) interviewed advertising professionals and discovered that the use of unethical tactics toward gender is purposeful. Thus, the gravity of gender roles, expectations, and differences is massive within the American economy.

Combined, the research and deductions discussed above affirm that the belief of dichotomous gender is all-encompassing in American culture. The three categories, historical, cultural, and economical, feed into one another in perpetuating the dualism of gender. America's history establishes its culture which is then reflected in its economy. Concurrently, American culture echoes its historical origins while the United States economy perpetuates the culture and establishes a modernized version of American history. For this reason, the concept of the existence of only two genders is constantly cycled through the minds of American citizens, to the extent that many do not realize this way of thinking is flawed. However, understanding the consequences of this mind frame is imperative. Currently, there is an abundance of political movement for gender equality, but implementing policies will not be thorough enough. It is indeed impossible to modify American history, but it is possible to work toward altering attitudes and behaviors surrounding gender. Only when our attitudes have changed will policies have the powerful impact they strive for; only then will gender equality be a reality.

Though it would be no easy task, the shifting of the American mindset to a more fluid perception of gender would have a tremendous effect in several areas. It would first and foremost change the psychology of a typical American, effecting thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors. This research would have anthropological implications as well because this shift in mindset would more than likely impact American culture. Additionally, the English language automatically adopts masculine pronouns when gender is ambiguous, so having a more comprehensive view of gender would impact the United States linguistically. Finally, those in healthcare professions would be more open-minded about gender and therefore would be able to individualize each patient's medical experience. Most importantly, an all-inclusive perspective of gender would make Americans a more compassionate breed.

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