

Sexual stereotyping a global social issue sociology essay



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In our first few moments of life we begin our journey of judgement and distinction. As the doctor utters the words “ it’s a ...girl” or possibly “ it’s a ... boy” arrangements have started. In North American society we have established a term for this classification and assessment and it is stereotyping. Stereotyping are the organizational factors that virtually shape the way we think in the 21st century. They somehow manage to categorize some of life’s most complex matters into nice distinct sections. Classification and organization, at first glance seem to be extremely useful in distinguishing various aspects of modern life. However, these grouping methods can be inaccurate, leaving flawed ideas in the minds of citizens on a global level. Sexual stereotyping is very prevalent in today’s society and it has begun to dominate the scenario in almost all aspects of life. Whether the lack of female promotions, or the gay comments that are tossed at emotional men, sexual stereotypes are powerful in our world. Sexual stereotyping is a major social problem that exists within our society. In this paper I will explore what sexual stereotyping really is and why it is a social problem; the sociological theory attached with this issue, and finally create a possible solution to this epidemic on society.

Sexual stereotyping refers to the practice of assigning roles or activities to individuals purely on the basis of sex. It has become a social problem because many of us view it as harmful to not only specific members of society but society as a whole. The people affected by this social problem, or those who are involved in this social problems are basically all men and women who have experienced discrimination based on their sex, no matter their age. An example of this is sexual stereotyping is seen in the workplace

normally through positional titles such as chair man, drafts man, and business man. (www. rcmp-learning. org, n. a., July 30, 1998) Sexual stereotyping can also be seen in sports. When men participate in any sort of physical activity they are praised and viewed in a positive light but for female athletes the same attitude is not always present. Female athletes are often termed with derogatory remarks such as dyke, butch, and masculine. This idea is also the same for men who participate in more delicate art forms such as dance, figure skating, and or synchronized swimming. (www. itha. edu, Kim Sebastio, n. d.). The problem is sexual stereotyping is not only role casting, but is also a change of attitude and treatment due to sex. Sexual stereotyping and prejudice can cause both men and women to be treated unequally by others, either because of hostility towards that specific sex or, less wittingly, because popular attitudes about women or men make it seem proper to treat them differently. Overt sexual prejudice is generally easier to recognize. An example is a female scientist or a businesswoman may find that she is not taken seriously, that her opinions are not as highly valued, and that her career is not considered important by those around her. (Bender, September-2004) For men it might be something as simple as disapproval for showing any sort of emotion. These examples are a clear view of what is wrong with our society. Any representation which perpetuates the thinking that men occupy certain kinds of positions or professions, while woman occupy others, constitutes sex-stereotyping “ no matter if it is men or women, it is wrong for them to be judged or treated differently because of their sex” (Pasanen, 182, n. d.) Even though this sort of judgment is wrong it is still going on and that is why it has become a social problem faced by millions of Canadian’s every day.

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The sociological theory attached with sexual stereotyping

In North America are society is influenced by many things one of them being gender roles. It is the distinction of men and women whom people and culture help prove the existence of these stereotypes. These sexual stereotypes come from a combination of the media, the influence of powerful people, and our past. This exact point brings me to the Theory on Gender Roles which relates specifically to this social problem, this same theory helps us as Canadians understand how gender inequality (sexual stereotyping) has become the social issue it is today. The structural functionalist view explains that society and more specifically institutions contribute to gender inequality because it argues that men work out of the home because they are physically stronger and can provide for us, and women stay at home because they are more nurturing and need to care for the children. An example of this is seen through how society instils this concept in the minds of children “ children are taught gender stereotypes by their peers and adults- for example, girls learn to be nurturing and boys are expected to be aggressive. According to Rhode, these messages, international or otherwise, are widespread”. (Egendorf, pg 21, 1997) Another way this theory helps explain the issue of gender inequality (or sexual stereotyping) is through the past. This is explained in the conflict perspective which believes that women are inferior outside the home but this is also because they are more valuable in the home; they came to this conclusion after World War II. In the end the perspective that best help us understand this prevalent social issue is the Symbolic Interactions Perspective. This perspective talks about how females and males are taught the meanings that correlate with masculine and

feminine. It explains how we conform to society's definition of what is masculine and feminine, and how are these definitions getting stretched. This is seen through the media, which is a huge part of the reason why there are sexual stereotypes in our culture. An example of this is the usage of the term magazine itself, it first came about with the publication of 'The gentlemen's Magazine' and the 'The Lady's Magazine' in the 1720s by Edward Cave (1691-1754) (Connor, G 2001). Magazines are not the only avenues of media where sexual stereotyping exist either. The media is constantly reminding us of what role we should play as women and men, what is the definition of masculine and feminine.

Like almost everything in life this theory has its strengths and weaknesses when it comes to really understanding the social issue of sexual stereotyping. The weaknesses include the structural functionalist perspective and conflict perspective because even though at one time these ideals were functional for society, they no longer hold any relevance because women are now just as valuable outside the house as they are inside, and vice versa for men. Secondly some women today are just as strong as men and can participate in physically demanding jobs such as construction or firefighting. The strengths of this theory all come from the symbolic interactions perspective; this is because most of today's sexual stereotyping comes from the idea of what is feminine and what is masculine, which is the key concept of this perspective.

Possible Solutions for Sexual Stereotyping

Like for all social problems we as a society are always looking for the remedy or the solution to the problem. Even though we probably won't be able to fully eliminate gender stereotyping we can lessen it by acknowledging it. Even though our society has taken huge steps towards changing the traditional sexual stereotypes, we have also created new ones at the same time. We assume all men that have a higher pitch voice or groom themselves must be gay, and that all women who are very athletic, and enjoy watching football to soap's must be into other women. Along with the new sexual stereotypes we have also tried to compensate for the past, but we are still not improving all these sexual stereotypes. We try to hire more female engineers, and more male nurses, but the fact of the matter is all we are doing is reversing the male/female roles instead of removing them. (Egendorf, pg 57-105, 1997) So until we stop over compensating, and really understand the dangers that gender stereotyping this social problem will never disappear.

The theory related to this social problem also has its own possible solution to this issue, which includes campaigns that advocate for men, and campaigns that empower women (Dove). Personally I agree with this solution because if we empower people rather than bring them down we can accomplish more as a society and dissolve this and many other social issues.