

# Sex gender and personal care products



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Sex/Gender and Personal Care Products For this application paper, I chose to write about personal care products as they relate to sex and gender. I chose this topic because I think that separate personal care products for men and women are, for the most part, ridiculous, and I also wanted to see what sort of differences there were between the two genders' answers to the questions. The people I had complete the survey were around the same age, which could have affected the results, but I found that women used about 4-6 more products than the men, on average.

However, the women had a significantly higher proportion of products used to maintain appearance. One of the men reported that he did not use any products only to improve appearance, while all of the women listed at least 3 products for appearance purposes only. I found the most interesting responses on the question that asked which 5 products the person would choose if they could only use 5 products for an entire week. All of the men included toothpaste, shampoo, soap/bodywash, and deodorant.

One of the three men included hair gel, but he was the only man who included anything in the list of 5 items that was exclusively for appearance purposes. On the contrary, all of the women included body lotion and body soap, but one woman wrote that she would choose mascara and lip balm and not toothpaste. An interesting observation that I made was that the men had trouble understanding the difference between which products were for good health/hygiene and which were for appearance.

None of the women asked me questions about those two questions on the survey, but all of the men did. While all of the women assumed that the two categories were mutually exclusive, none of the men did, and answered the

two questions with very similar numbers (for example, the health/hygiene proportion would be 9/10, and appearance proportion would be 10/10). The women had more even proportions, with about 1: 3 to 1: 1 appearance: hygiene ratio. My findings mostly support society's views on gender differences, that the genders are very different and should be separated distinctly.

With personal care products, society is conflating sex and gender. People claim that it's " natural" for people to use products designed for their gender. However, sex is biological, but gender is socially constructed. Therefore, the personal care product companies are catering to social constructions. It is obvious that they are more concerned with social constructions than biological differences with a quick glance strolling down the aisles at a pharmacy. Products for men, for example, Dove Men + Care, use colors like gray and blue.

Dove products targeted at women feature shades of pink and fruity scents. While gray and blue are associated with masculinity and pink with femininity, these are not inborn, biological differences. They are socially constructed ideas about what should be associated with each gender. With the weak and easily disproved argument that personal care products are rooted in biological differences tossed aside, it is easy to see many issues with gendering personal care products.

First of all, women have many more personal care products than men. With the exception of feminine hygiene products like tampons and sanitary pads, women and men, for the sake of hygiene, have very similar personal care product needs. Both use soap, shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, and maybe

lotion and shaving products. However, while men's products are often streamlined, like 2-in-1, women have a whole array of products targeted specifically toward them that do not have a male equivalent.

For example, anti-aging cream, makeup, eye cream, and other products designed to improve appearance are targeted at women, which sends the message that women need to worry about their appearances much more than men. Furthermore, not only are women encouraged to use more products than men, they are often more expensive. I examined the differences between men's and women's deodorants on drugstore.com and found that 2.6 oz of Degree for Women deodorant/antiperspirant is \$4.99, while 2.7 oz of Degree for Men is \$3.49. Not only do women have more products targeted at them, they are more expensive.

Another thing I noticed in the deodorant section was that while most men's deodorants come in both an antiperspirant and non-antiperspirant variety, almost all of the women's deodorants contained antiperspirants. This sends a message that sweating, a basic and necessary biological function that all humans do, is okay for men, but not for women. The findings were mostly what I expected. I did expect the women to report using a higher number of personal care products, but I also know that they most likely forgot about some things that they use on a regular basis; however, the men could have also forgotten some things that they use.