

Studies on gender schemas and subcultures



Throughout the world, preconceived notions of gender and gender identity are extensively prevalent. All over the world, individuals are judged on their character, intelligence, and work-ethic strictly based on their gender or gender identity. This, in turn, has led to a vast array of effects, such as discrimination, bigotry, and even violence. Fortunately, psychologists and scientists are extensively studying the reasons why these gender related preconceived cognitive phenomena happen as well as the implications that they manifest. Specifically, gender subcultures and gender schemas are two cognitive phenomena that are being extensively studied, and psychologists and scientists are trying to figure out why and how these phenomena happen.

Theory I A: Gender Subcultures

As social creatures, humans instinctively have the intuition to be a part of a group. In order for individuals to find a group to join, they will typically seek out groups that share common characteristics with themselves, such as race, age, or gender. Gender is one of many subcultures of group identity that many individuals will gravitate towards. Many individuals will typically gravitate towards a gender group identity because it is extensively abundant throughout the world as well as being very easy to assimilate into. For example, with young children, a boy will gravitate towards being with other boys specifically because they are all boys, and also because they share common characteristics with one another. This sort of gender self-segregation is also prevalent for girls. Once children self-segregate themselves into these gender-based groups, they will partake in activities that are stereotypical of that same-gender group, even if some members of

the group do not enjoy these activities. For instance, a young boy may start to play football with his other male companions not necessarily because he himself enjoys the activity, but because that is a popular activity with boys at large. It is within these gender subculture that stereotypical gender roles are solidified, even though it may not be explicitly seen as happening.

Theory I B: Gender Subcultures Research

Regarding gender subcultures, copious amounts of research have been done in order to adequately explain this phenomenon. While there have been hundreds of experiments and academic articles written regarding gender subcultures, only two will be highlighted. In one observation (Maccoby, 2002), children in elementary school were told to participate in a story recall activity. The thematic elements of the story progressively began to change, as the general theme of the story that was being recalled by boys began to intensify in its violence and conflict. Girls recalled the story in more non-violent manners. Also, earlier on in the academic year, boys were more likely to have girls participate in their story recall. However, by the end of the year, it became exclusively same-sex groups for story recall. This observation shows that at the beginning of the academic year, boys began to self-socialize themselves into gender subcultures. This, in turn, lead to a massive increase in stereotypical masculine traits, such as aggression and violence. Finally, this led to the ostracization of the opposite gender, continuing to only focus on those that are in their immediate gender subculture.

In another study (Fine, 2010), experiments wanted to analyze how parents will react toward a child depending on their gender. When boys and girls are

presented to an adult that is not the child's parents, these adults will talk to the children in a different manner. Boys are presented by being told they are strong and powerful, and girls are presented by being told they are beautiful and pretty. In addition, when adults are in the presence of a child, the adults will provide different toys to the child based on its sex. Boys are automatically given "masculine" toys and girls are given "feminine" toys. Adults put these children into gender subcultures because then it is easier to identify certain stereotypical attributes about them. However, when this is done, these children are already being thrust into their stereotypical gender roles, and thus are quickly becoming established within their respective subculture. This shows that children are put into respective categories, and then must participate in the socially acceptable norms of that group.

Theory II A: Gender Schemas

When individuals perceive one another, it is typical that one will analyze another human being with a certain self-established perspective. One manner in which this is done is with gender schemas. Specifically, gender schemas are a non-conscious, or non-explicit, perspective taken regarding the interpretation of behavior. This causes individuals to process the behaviors of both men and women differently, thus leading to different treatment. This unconscious processing of different individuals ultimately puts individuals into a binary category, resulting in solidified gender stereotypes to unfold and be presented. For example, when an infant is presented as clearly undistinguishable as male or female, different perceptions will arise when specific colors or clothing are administered to the infant, thus leading to different reactions.

Theory II B: Gender Schemas Research

Similar to gender subcultures, there has also been extensive studies and research done regarding gender schemas. In one study conducted in 2004 (Valian, 2004), in which both men and women were to be reviewed regarding their performance at an aircraft company by experimental participants. In this experiment, both the men and the women were classified as occupying “assistant vice presidents” positions. In half of the examples presented, both men and women were described as going to have a performance review, so their professional conduct was not known. In the remaining cases, both men and women were described as having fantastic professional performance. In the cases in which professional conduct was not known, men were rated as being more competent than women, yet equally likeable. However, when credentials were presented as being fantastic, men and women were rated equally as competent, yet women were rated as less likable. The implications of the results of this study is that because the women in this experiment are occupying a position that is deemed to be predominately suited for men, such as being in administrative or leadership roles, they are viewed as not in their respective gender schema. This, in turn, leads others to view them as subpar for the position, either in competence, likeability, or an abundance of other factors.

Another study regarding gender schemas is one in which participants were presented two worlds in succession (Valian, 2007). This participants in this experiment were college students, varying in their respective academic year. The first word was a trait, such as “outgoing” or “shy.” The following word was a name, such as “Lauren” or “Kyle.” Participants were told to conclude

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if the second word was either male or female. Results of the experiment showed that participants identified the second word as either being male or female quicker when the previous word was considered typical of that respective gender. For example, word " Kyle" would be identified as male quicker when the word " outgoing" was presented beforehand. Similar to the study discussed above, the implications of this study conclude that when words are deemed to be stereotypical of a respective group, they are remembered quicker because they are representative of that gender schema. Words that are associated with men and masculinity, such as " outgoing," " strong," and " powerful" will be easily retrieved in our minds because these are words that are present in the male gender schema.

Critical Thinking

While researching these various topics, I quickly became obsessed with the manner in which these phenomena play out in the real world. Both gender subcultures and gender schemas clearly seem to be inherent into our consciousness to some unquantifiable degree. Is it truly ever possible to not put individuals into different subcultures and schemas? I personally believe that if gender subcultures and schemas did not exist, the equality between men and women would dramatically rise, and preconceived notions regarding one another would drastically decline. It could even be plausible that sexism would become non-existent. Also, I began to become quite curious regarding the repercussions of gender subcultures and schemas. I began to wonder - are gender schemas and gender subcultures negative, or are they just a reality of the human experience? Based on the research that I

have read so far, there does not seem to be a clear answer, and I doubt that there will be one for years to come.

Also, during my time studying gender schemas and subcultures, I found the importance of men's (and women's) activities in human evolution the most interesting. Clearly men and women contributed equally to the survival of humans. However, the male's activities are deemed more important and much more vital to the survival of the human race, specifically in instances of hunting and gathering societies. Why is this? First, it is not intellectually sound, and there is actually significant evidence to support the opposite claim. Furthermore, are the males activities just seen as grander, or is something more sinister taking place that allows the males contributions to be deemed more important? Could it be possible that the vast majority of intellectuals and scientists are aware of the reality that women are contributing much more than they are given credit for, and are only elevating the men's contributions to enforce the status quo? Unfortunately, there is no clear answer.

Bibliography

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