Student Example

WOMS 306

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**Media paper: gender stereotyping in video games, television commercials, and magazines**

Imagine never viewing a single commercial, magazine advertisement, or any form of media for that matter. That’s hard to imagine, right? Society as a whole might very well be a different place to inhabit if we never viewed a single form of media. But it seems outside media and influence remains unavoidable. The repercussions of viewing this media can be seen throughout the world today. This media effects the way we view women and men and help to socially construct gender stereotypes. I chose to write my paper over gender stereotyping in video games and commercials. Both of these forms of media have a prominent display of gender stereotyping. I found two articles that help explain the gender stereotyping throughout these two forms of media. The first article I found by Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana Mastro goes over the effects of sexualizing female video game characters and how media portrays them. The second article I found by Malgorzata Wolska shows the different ways television commercials gender stereotype. I also used many of the concepts I have learned throughout this semester on genders and how they are stereotyped. Within video games women are often seen as non playable characters and are often over sexualized within the game, and the male players are usually seen as the heros. Women will wear outfits that display their female body parts and make them more appealing to men, who are often the users of video games. Stereoypes for women and men are apparent in most television commercials. These commercials aim their products specifically at men and women by categorizing them a certain way.

In the article I read on gender stereotyping in video games and within what I have viewed from different video games I can see that there is a strong distinction as to how the women and men are portrayed. The video game market is a billion dollar industry which makes it a massive influence on how we view every day things. Women and men partake in entirely different character roles within these games. Women in video games are often non-playable characters, and when they are playable they are typically overtly sexualized and portrayed wearing promiscuous dress and engaging in seductive acts. Not unlike other media, video games offer a small range of roles to female characters. Overall, when female characters appear in video games they most often serve as victims or prizes. Video game portrayals of the female body often construct an individual's social and moral expectations about gender appropriate dress, female body type and female self worth (3). There seems to be more male playable characters and they often times seem to be the heroes of the game or the adventurers. Even just looking at a game as simple as Mario Kart you can see a clear definitive difference between gender roles. Peach, the female character, wears all pink and has delicate gloves and also drives a pink car. On the other hand the male characters are seen as stronger and often more aggressive and many will even say that's it's more difficult win while playing the female characters though that can be disputed.. In an article I read recently by Yi Mou titled “Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Popular Video Games” he even stated through research that only 15% of video games portrayed women as heroes or action characters (923). That number is incredibly low for the amount of video games that are being marketed today. There is one video game that breaks some of those stereotypical ideas of women. The Lara Croft Tomb Raider video games portray Lara, the main character, as strong and heroic. She fights numerous animals and bad guys. She breaks the boundaries of a female becoming a heroic and strong character. Seems like she's paving a new path for women empowerment, right? While she tears down these boundaries she still seems to be portrayed in a stereotypical way in that her female features are exaggerated by sexy attire and a thin body. It seems to be difficult to have a balance of a female character being both heroic and modestly dressed.Video games aren't the only form of stereotyping in media, commercials also play a strong role in how we categorize both males and females. In Wolskas article on stereotyping in media he writes about how women are more often used in commercials because they are seen as responsible for everyday purchases. Men usually advertise for cars, business products or investments whereas women advertise more for cosmetics or domestic products. Within commercials it seems that women are more often seen in the household while men are seen outdoors. Beauty products and household items are usually marketed towards women because that seems to be the way women are valued by their looks and their ability to maintain a household. While women are often oversexualized in commercials there are many women empowerment ads and commercials that are surfacing and creating hope for the future. Men's commercials often focus on being a lady's man. Take for example the Axe body spray commercials where once a man uses the spray he is instantly surrounded by females and wanted by all of them. This creates the ideal that men should focus on attracting women and womanizing.

Magazines are also a form of media that have a large impact on gender stereotyping within media. Magazines have been around for many years and people often look at them as a past time and a way to create ideas for their everyday life. Women and men are often taught that they need certain products solely based on their gender, and magazines are a large culprit in creating these gender stereotypes. Magazines tend to portray an image to our society that there is a clear division between what it means to be masculine and what it means to be feminine. Women’s magazines often portray the ideal woman as slender and young. Race also seems to play a role in the ideal woman in magazines. Most women in magazines seem to be white, young, thin females, which does not make up the majority of the population. Magazines also market cleaning products and cosmetics to women as a way of stereotyping what the average women should be purchasing. Men’s magazines are far from safe from this gender stereotyping. Men’s magazines often portray the men as muscular and with strong manly facial features. They make this appear to be the ideal body image of a man. Most men’s magazines also market certain products to men such as outdoor/workout equipment (to maintain their physique) and cologne that can attract any woman.

I think the purpose of stereotyping within video games is for males to remain the more powerful gender and for women to be “the pretty non-playable character” that adds a nice view for males that play the game. I think it also makes the usual male player feel more powerful if he has the ability to play these masculine characters surrounded by over sexualized women. I think the purpose of these stereotypes in commercials is to help maintain order and make it easier for us to identify men and women based on the products marketed towards them. In both form of media these portrayals benefit men in a way that keeps them both powerful and superior to women in many ways. They also show a disadvantage to certain groups as well. In video games women are only seen as sexual characters and rarely lead roles. This makes it seem as though women are only good for their body and conforming to men's sexual desires. In commercials everything for women seems to be geared towards improving their looks or improving their home making skills. Society may encourage women to look down upon their own physique through subliminal messaging. Women may give into Botox, bulimia, anorexia, or any other disorder just to fit the social norm of society. Body dysmorphia is an entirely new subjects that is product of the mass media and how it portrays women. Women are constantly subjected to the views of media and their ideals. This creates a negative impact on women in making them think that their self worth is what they look like and how they take care of their family and that is their sole responsibility to take care of both of those things. These social categorizations also impact children in a negative way in that it creates the ideal that women aren't as powerful as men and that they are often only seen for their body and outer appearance. These stereotypes maintain the gender system by keeping men in power and keeping women at home and focusing on their looks and maintaining that home.

This class and the texts we have read have helped to educate me more on the consequences of gender stereotyping. This class has helped me to understand that this stereotyping is socially constructed and that we are the only ones that can reverse it because of this. It has also made me learn that stereotyping can negatively impact children and make them feel like an outsider if they do not maintain these gender ideals that we have created. These stereotypes also create social constructs that may not be attainable for everyone therefore making them feel as though they do not belong or that they need to somehow attain these ideals even though it may be difficult and unreasonable. Because of this class I think of gender as more of a way that we define people. Our gender seems to determine much of our life. It's not just a determinant on what toys we play with and what color we are given to wear. It also controls our job positions, domestic roles, and how we act. Gender seems to define who we are sadly, and it seems difficult to avoid. Gender stereotyping is everywhere as you can see just within this paper. It controls nearly everything we do. This class has helped me understand that gender, race, class, and sexual orientation are all ways of keeping certain people in power and more superior to the others. For example white, heterosexual, upper class, men are considered superior over all other races, classes, and genders. This classification maintains order among our society. Our gender plays a huge role in how society views us and what our worth is. Gender categorizing is no longer just choosing between pink or blue. It effects everything we choose.

References

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