About a year ago, I attended a church service each Sunday with a few of my family members. The service typically began with announcements of upcoming events, church needs, and job opportunities. During the time, one of the most anticipated events was a workshop lead by a (heterosexual) married couple aimed towards improving communication between husbands and wives. In the preview video, the wife of the couple hosting the workshop stated, “Men are like waffles, and women are like spaghetti.” She went on to explain that men can only focus on one thing at once, and their thoughts are compartmentalized, drawing an analogy to the way that syrup gets trapped or contained in each square of a waffle. On the other hand, women represent spaghetti in the way that if you ever followed a spaghetti noodle on your plate, you would notice that it touched every other noodle before you found the end, implying that one thing is connected to everything else in a woman’s mind.

Each time the workshop clip played at the beginning of the service, men and women in the audience would chuckle as if affirming, “Yeah, that describes the way my spouse thinks and why I can’t get through to him/her sometimes!” The viewpoint and collective reaction to it upholds typical stereotypes that all men are simple-minded and poor listeners, and that all women are touchy, complicated, and difficult to understand. Further, it reinforces the perspective that men and women are widely different not only in their communication styles but in their overall nature as human beings, which directly illustrates Michael Kimmel’s concept of an Interplanetary Theory of Gender.

Our cultural perspective of gender differences that expect men to be detached and unemotional and women to be sensitive and emotionally expressive is further demonstrated in my past interactions with a good friend who is male. We became friends in high school, and he often discussed his personal struggles and relationship issues with me to a degree that, admittedly, I didn’t expect of a male. His emotional sensitivity and the degree to which he expressed concern for others did not fit my schema of what a man was like. Drawing from Kimmel’s words, he did not match the hegemonic definition of masculinity; he represented a subordinate form of masculinity in the sense that his emotionally expressive character deviated from the indifferent character expected of all men. Other friends picked up on this too, and while very few of us criticized him for it, the fact that he was an emotionally sensitive male stood out as an exception in our minds. Instead of him being thought of as a human being who is more expressive than other individuals tend to be, he was regarded as a feminine male, as if his identification as a male defined him and our expectations of him before he could define himself and embody human qualities without “breaking” any rules of masculinity.

My final observation of our gendered society concerns a recent episode of the popular TV show, Shark Tank, which allows entrepreneurs an opportunity to partner with investors, or “sharks,” after demonstrating the originality and utility of their product/service. In this particular episode, investor and QVC queen Lori Greiner took advantage of a gap between questions to offer input and raise her concerns related to a product. Before she completed her first sentence, investor Kevin O’Leary began talking over her as if she had never started talking. Within those moments, Lori Greiner discontinued offering her insights. This brief incident serves to demonstrate that even though Lori and Kevin are both in powerful occupational positions, Kevin’s position as a male fosters his expression of dominance by speaking over her. In this manner, this episode along with the previously mentioned occurrences highlight the divide our society draws between males and females and the tendency to favor hegemonic masculinity over other expressions of gender.

4 hours ago

this is the example, i hope you will do accordingly