Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VII

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Analyze the relationship between one’s beliefs and one’s group memberships.
   2.1 Explain how gender and sexuality have shifted over time.
   2.2 Differentiate between sex and gender.
   2.3 Examine how sexuality and identity shape sexual orientation.

4. Evaluate patterns of behavior through sociological skills and theory.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 12:
Gender and Sexuality

Unit Lesson

Why do we ask the gender of a baby?

Mostly, we expect the parents to buy into our preconceived ideas on attitude, dress, and behavior based on gender. By asking the sex, we can be sure we will buy the “right” gendered gift for the baby. Seriously, go online to the Toys R’ Us website. Note that there are pull-down menus that direct you to “boy toys” and “girl toys.” What is interesting to note is that in the pink section, girls play with girl dolls they call dolls. In the blue section, boys play with boy dolls they call action figures. The other thing to note is that the boys’ toys are mostly action-oriented, and the girls’ toys tend to be more sedentary.

Sex is a biological category of people. Gender is a socially constructed category of people. This means that gender does not exist on its own. There are no “real men” or “real women.” Instead, there are simply people who we, as a society, decide should act or dress in a particular way. Why do men wear pants and allow their facial hair to grow? Because we, as a community, train them to do so. Why do many women stay home with their children? Because we teach women to be more nurturing and selfless. Institutions such as the family, religion, and media support an ideology that results in sexist gender relations. Women and women’s behaviors are valued less than men and men’s behaviors.

Have you heard anyone claim that sexism is outdated? Recently, a student pointed to the fact that he saw a woman operating a steamroller when he was driving on the highway. The very fact that he noticed the one female and not the six males who were also operating them speaks volumes on sexism being alive and well.

One of the reasons young people believe sexism is outdated is because they see women in positions of professional equity with men. These women are making strides. However, the older women are still completely disadvantaged and in low-paying, gender-segregated jobs. Moreover, young, uneducated women also find themselves in positions of inequity with men. This is especially true for women of color and poor women.

Just what is sexism? According to George Albee (1981), sexism can be defined as: “ascribing superiority or inferiority, unsupported by any evidence, in traits, abilities, social value, personal worth, and other characteristics to males or females as a group.” Albee points out that sexism is “woven into the texture of our lives” and is harmful to both males and females in a variety of ways.

Sexism can be blatant, covert, or subtle. Blatant sexism is obvious, clearly unfair treatment of women, when compared to similar treatment of men. Covert sexism, on the other hand, is sexism that is recognized but
purposely hidden from view. Finally, subtle sexism represents unequal and unfair treatment of women that is not recognized by many people because it is perceived to be normative, and therefore does not appear unusual (Swim & Cohen, 1997).

One way we can easily understand subtle sexism is through language. We teach children to use sexist language in the same way they learn to speak. They hear it from family, friends, and through the media. Thus, it appears to be the normal way to speak. However, this form of sexism perpetuates the gender stereotypes and status differences between men and women (Swim & Cohen, 1997).

What are some examples of sexist language? Using the pronoun “he” when we mean “he or she” is one example of sexist language. Media coverage of presidential campaigns also provide a means for recognizing subtle sexism. Often, reporters are heard referring to a female incumbent as “the female senator from New York.” By including the term “female,” the reporter is suggesting that the usual or accepted gender for senator is male. (You never hear them say “the male senator from Arizona” for the opposition.)

Sexism manifests itself in both attitudes and behaviors at the individual level and at the institutional level. At the individual level, blatant sexism is easy to see. For example, a person may hold sexist attitudes, such as the attitude that males are better than females in business, or males are smarter than females. Individual sexist behavior is often noticeable, too. For instance, in a classroom, a sexist teacher might suggest that boys should study math and girls should study the humanities. Subtle sexist behavior in the classroom happens unknowingly when a teacher only calls on boys, or praises the work of mostly boys.

Both blatant and subtle sexism in individuals come from individual beliefs. However, individuals are very much aware of their beliefs in blatant sexism, whereas in subtle sexism, individuals may simply hold traditional ideas of gender norms. Either way, the consequences of both blatant and subtle sexism are very real.

However, sexism also exists at the institutional level. Institutional sexism exists and is sometimes more difficult for students to perceive. Institutional sexism is the subordination of women that is part of the everyday workings of an institution such as education, criminal justice, or the economy. Institutional sexism happens in communities that continue to treat domestic violence as a private matter between a husband and wife. Another example is the higher value given to “masculine” qualities in organizations (in other words, competition vs. cooperation).

Reference


Suggested Reading

Learn more about this week’s topics by researching in the databases of the CSU Online Library. The following are examples of what is available in the General OneFile database:


**Learning Activities (Non-Graded)**

**SocThink**

Your textbook provides several opportunities for you to explore relevant topics, from personal self-exploration to challenging questions concerning topics being studied in this unit. Taking the time to read and respond to these opportunities will help you learn and apply the information being studied. These opportunities can be found on the following pages:

- Chapter 12
  - Pg. 293
  - Pg. 297
  - Pg. 301
  - Pg. 304
  - Pg. 307

**Check Your Learning**

Quizzes are a way to self-test to see if you understand what you are studying. The textbook provides a brief “Pop Quiz” for each chapter. Take advantage of this learning tool to enrich your learning experience! The answers are provided, so you can check and see how well you did. For this unit, the quizzes are available on the following page:

- Chapter 12 Pop Quiz, Pg. 315

**Sex and Gender in Advertising**

Find three images of advertisements online. (Hint: The ads should have people in them)

Review the following questions about each advertisement:

1. What social group is the ad directed toward? What social groups are represented in the ad? (Hint: They are not always the same.)
2. Does the advertisement reinforce or violate cultural gender/sexual norms? If it violates them, what purpose do you think the violation serves? If it reinforces, explain how.
3. In addition to the product, what else is the ad selling? (Hint: Consider things like love, marriage, sex, individuality, freedom, sophistication, leisure and other desirables.)
4. What is your reaction to the ad?

These are non-graded activities, so you do not have to submit them. However, if you have difficulty with any concepts, contact your instructor for additional discussion and/or explanation.