Women's Lives: A Psychological Exploration 3/e

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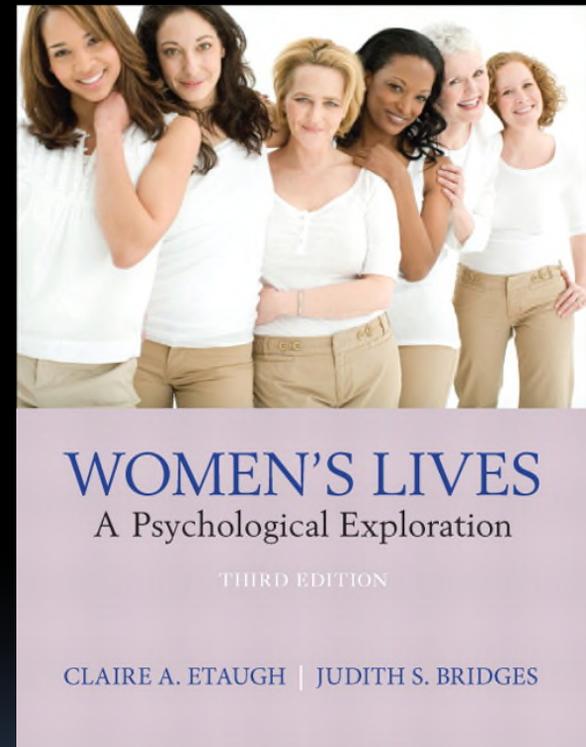
Chapter 2

Cultural Representation of Gender

Stereotypes of Females and Males

The content of gender stereotypes

- Gender stereotypes: Widely shared beliefs about the attributes of females and males

  - Communion: Traits stereotypically associated with women such as sympathy and warmth, which reflect a concern about other people

  - Agency: Traits stereotypically associated with men, such as achievement orientation and ambitiousness, which reflect a concern about accomplishing tasks

Stereotypes of Females and Males

The content of gender stereotypes, continued

- Some gender stereotypes have remained relatively unchanged since the 1970s

- Attributes associated with the male stereotype are more highly regarded and considered more powerful in North American society (Fiske & Cuddy, 2006)

- Gender-related stereotypes can guide our expectations and interpretations of other people

- Gender-related stereotypes can guide choices we make about our own behavior

- There is a discrepancy between the traits North Americans regard as *representative* of most women and men and those they consider *ideal* for women and men (e.g., Street et al., 1995)

Stereotypes of Females and Males

The perceiver's ethnicity and gender stereotypes

- People from different ethnic backgrounds vary in the degree to which they believe the ideal traits for females are different from those for males
  - Research suggests that Blacks are the least likely to adhere to rigid gender stereotypes (Harris, 1994)

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Stereotypes of Females and Males

The target's characteristics and gender stereotypes

- Age
  - ➤ Ageism: Bias against older people (Hurd Clarke, 2011)

- Ethnicity

- Social class

- Sexual orientation

- Ableness
  - ➤ Ableism: bias against people because of their disability (Chisholm & Greene, 2008)

Stereotypes of Girls and Boys

Adults' gender-stereotypic expectations of children

- Newborn girls and boys perceived differently
  - Girls rated as finer featured, less strong, more delicate than boys
- 4- to 7-year-old girls and boys perceived differently
  - Perceived traits reflect communion-agency stereotypes

Bases for Gender Stereotypes

Process

- Social categorization
  - Helps simplify our social perceptions
  - Based on easily identifiable characteristics
  - Can lead us astray…

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Bases for Gender Stereotypes

Content

- Social role theory
  - Stereotypes of women and men stem from the association of women with the domestic role and men with the employee role (Wood & Eagly, 2010)
  - Research demonstrates the influence of a person's social role on the application of gender-related traits to her or him
  - Social roles influence gender stereotypes even when people are asked to describe women and men in both the past and the future
  - Helps explain why gender stereotypes are resistant to change despite increased participation of women in the labor force

Stereotypes Based on Identity Labels

- Long-standing cultural norm that a woman is defined in terms of her relationship to a man (Gooding & Kreider, 2010)

- Our impressions of women are influenced by her preferred title (Mrs., Miss, Ms) and by her choice of surname when she marries

- Stereotypes of women who prefer nontraditional forms of address might be due to the belief that they are in nontraditional roles

Sexism: Experiences and Attitudes

Stereotypes and/or discriminatory behaviors that serve to restrict women's roles and maintain male domination

- Backlash effect

- Ann Hopkins

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Sexism, continued

Changes in sexist attitudes over time

- Sexism has decreased in the U.S. since 1970

- May be due in part to changes in legislation

- Changes over time may reflect decreased social acceptability of blatantly sexist views rather than real changes in beliefs

Sexism, continued

Experiences with sexism

- Most girls and women experience sexism

- Women vary in their interpretation of sexist incidents

- Women vary in their willingness to acknowledge their own experience with discrimination (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997)

Sexism, continued

Ambivalent Sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2007)

- Modern sexism: Belief that gender discrimination is no longer a problem in society and is manifested by harmful treatment of women in ways that appear to be socially acceptable (Swim, Becker et al., 2010)

- Hostile sexism: Negative stereotypes of women

- Benevolent sexism: Positive characterizations such as "women are pure" or "women should be protected"

Representation of Gender in the Media

Pattern 1: Underrepresentation of females

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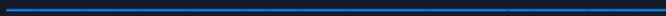
Representation of Gender in the Media

Pattern 2: Underrepresentation of specific groups of females

■ Ethnicity

■ Age
  ➤ Double standard of aging

■ Sexual orientation

Representation of Gender in the Media

Pattern 3: Portrayal of gender-based social roles

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Representation of Gender in the Media

Pattern 4: Depiction of female communion and male agency

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Representation of Gender in the Media

Pattern 5: Emphasis on female attractiveness and sexuality

- Electronic media

- Print media

- Focus on thinness

- White beauty is valued

- Dove campaign

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Representation of Gender in the Media

Impact of gender-role media images

- Socializing effect

- Shapes our construction of gender

- Shapes our expectations of what females and males are like

Representation of Gender in the English Language

Language practices based on the assumption that male is normative

- Masculine generic language: Language that uses male terms but purports to be inclusive of males and females

- Spotlighting: The practice of emphasizing an individual's gender

- Diminutive suffixes for female terms

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Representation of Gender in the English Language

Negative terms for females

- Parallel terms

- Childlike terms

- Animal and food terms

- Sexualization of women

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Representation of Gender in the English Language

Significance of differential treatment of females and males in language

- Sexist language reinforces and perpetuates gender stereotypes (Swim et al., 2003, 2004)

- Sexist language reinforces and perpetuates status differences between women and men (Swim et al., 2003, 2004)