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COM 441

9 December 2023

Final Paper

The portrayal of gender stereotypes has been a long lasting problem in the realm of media. Humans can be and have been easily influenced by all sorts of media. Movies, tv shows, social media, and more, media has the power to shape our minds and thoughts towards anything. Due to the media's influence over humans, certain deceptions of masculinity and femininity have become ingrained in our consciousness, thus changing our behaviors towards certain types of people. This is problematic for a plethora of reasons.

For starters, misrepresentation of genders in media reinforces traditional gender roles. For many years now, women have been depicted as being passive and weaker than men while men are depicted as being more dominant. Women in particular are often more objectified in media as films tend to focus on their looks and physical appearance rather than their intelligence. We will get into a concrete example of this in a little bit. Nonetheless, these portrayals limit the evolution of gender roles in modern society today. It goes back to that old school train of thought that a husband wakes up everyday and goes to work while his wife stays home at the house and cleans, takes care of the kids, etc. But then we have to ask ourselves, why does the problem continue to happen?

Well, one of the main reasons for that is oftentimes there is a lack of diversity in decision making behind the scenes. A recent study shows that studios are often going with white male directors. In films that had a budget above 30 million dollars white males, "Accounted for 73%

of film directors in theatrical release”(Coyle). Since directors are often white males, they have trouble fully understanding minority struggles. They can try to be empathetic with different ethnic groups and cultures or with people that are a different gender as hard as they want, but they will never truly understand their experiences; they don’t walk in their shoes. The lack of fully understanding leads to misrepresentation. Another reason why this problem always takes place could be due to a company's profit motives. The film industry is all about making money, and unfortunately money is the route of all evil. Sometimes, producers will opt to go with the point of view that the majority of the audience will agree with to ensure their movie or tv show will be met with open arms. If you lose the audience, you lose money, plain and simple. For example, Paramount Pictures just recently reported a steep decline in their streaming profits as they stated they had, “A direct-to-consumer (DTC) loss of \$238 million”(Canal). Also, producers may hold unconscious biases that influence decision making. This is tough for one to self identify because it's unconscious; they are unaware of it. How can you solve a problem you can’t even identify? These are just three of the many reasons why misrepresentations of genders and gender stereotyping are still prevalent in the media today.

One specific example of gender stereotyping in modern media today occurs in the movie *Dumb Blonde*. The film is layered with typical feminine stereotypes; main character Elle Woods is a blonde sorority girl who at the beginning only cared about partying, shopping, etc. Her boyfriend breaks up with her because he believed she was dumb. This causes her to completely shift her mindset and applies to law school in an attempt to win him back and prove she isn’t the stereotypical blonde. During law school, she experienced lots of male control and was even sexually harassed by one of her professors. Her professors only viewed her for her looks and never for her intelligence. Yet throughout all the adversity, she persevered and graduated law

school. This is a clear representation of gender stereotyping. Woods is assumed to be dumb and lack intelligence due to the fact she was a blonde white woman. Her determination to prove the people around her wrong leads to her graduating. But she doesn't do it for herself, she does it to prove the people around her wrong.

Shifting to the male side of things, *The Wolf of Wall Street* demonstrates multiple examples of toxic masculinity portraying Jordan Belfort's character. Now to be fair, the movie is based on a true story so they do need to accurately portray Belfort's life. Yet the movie should have put more of a focus on Belfort's jail time for the crimes he committed and his downfall rather than putting an emphasis on the lifestyle he lived as he was successful. Jordan Belfort worked at several brokerage firms and eventually started his own firm after making enough money. His firm reached immense amounts of success earning hundreds of millions of dollars. In the beginning of the movie, Leonardo DiCaprio who is casted to play Belfort reiterates one of Belfort's most famous quotes stating, "The year I turned 26 as the head of my own brokerage firm I made 49 million, which really pissed me off because it was three shy of a million a week" (*The Wolf of Wall Street* 1:51). This wealth caused Belfort to start partying and doing drugs; he had so much money he didn't know what to do with all of it. He believed he was invincible and no one could stop him. Belfort ended up getting arrested by the FBI for money laundering and securities fraud. Belfort's firm Stratton Oakmont, "Bilked more than 1,500 individual investors out of \$200 million" (Crime Museum). Due to this, Belfort was sentenced to four years in prison and had to pay an additional fine of 110.4 million dollars. For certain audiences, this movie can easily cause one's behavior to change and set false expectations in one's mind. It can cause someone to crave the lifestyle Belfort was living without taking into account all the negatives that eventually came with it. Women are constantly objectified in this movie as they throw themselves at Belfort and

his friends. One of the first scenes you see is Belfort's wife performing oral sex on him in the backseat of a car; there is also the use of women prostitutes and strippers throughout. On top of that, Belfort cheats on his first wife in the movie with his second one. Men are portrayed as hot head drug addicts who only care about partying, making money, and picking up girls while women are subjected to the men's "power".

One final example of media in which gender stereotypes were present are in the movie that was released just this past summer, *Barbie*. This movie does a great job of portraying both masculinity and femininity. In the film "Barbies" are representative of females and "Kens" represent males. The main Barbie is your stereotypical blonde, similar to Elle Woods in *Dumb Blonde* we alluded to earlier. She's portrayed to be beautiful and wanted by the men around her for her looks, yet she also isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer during the movie. In the beginning of the film the Barbies are in charge of land which makes Ken feel like he is lacking purpose, causing him to leave. After Ken gets exposed to a more male driven society (one similar to the society in which we live in today), he embraces patriarchy and brings it back to Barbie Land. This caused the Kens to take over the land from the Barbies. The Kens take on the stereotypical macho leadership role as the Barbies become more submissive, digging into feminine stereotypes as well. After the Kens takeover, they revert to violence and toxic masculinity as a way to express themselves. The movie concludes with both Barbies and Kens realizing that there needs to be more equality amongst themselves. When men or women have more power than the other it disrupts the balance of the land.

Now although there's what seems like an infinite amount of media that's filled with gender stereotyping and misrepresentation, there are some forms of media out there that challenge this problem by breaking gender and racial stereotypes. Specifically, *The Hunger*

Games franchise does a great job of rejecting gender binaries. Katniss Everdeen, a 16 year old female, completely rejects the idea that females are submissive to males as she is portrayed as immensely confident while being strong, intelligent, and is top of the line at archery. Her male counterpart, Peeta Mellark, is emotionally expressive, physically strong, and is a baker. Normally you would see the female be the baker and the male be the archer, but that isn't the case here. Katniss and Peeta have a balanced relationship as they both draw from the positives of masculinity and femininity. The only difference is Katniss has the positive masculine traits and Peeta has the positive feminine traits. Peeta is much more in touch with his feelings and emotions while Katniss is the stronger of the two acting as the killer and hunter. When Peeta thinks he lost Katniss in the woods he is very emotional. He is described to be, "Easily swept up in the predictable teen romance whereas Katniss thinks this will make the ending of the Games harder, as to their knowledge there can only be one survivor"(Hodgkinson). The directors of the film did this to break boundaries and present the audience with a couple that is in a healthy relationship that does not follow the stereotypical gender roles you see in many other films and tv shows. Katniss acts as the alpha in her and Peeta's relationship, and they're both happy to be with one another!

Women are often used as sex figures and eye candy for the audience, but not Everdeen. She receives praise and recognition by viewers for her character and personality. A main female character being portrayed with a personality is rare in the film industry, yet in *The Hunger Games*, she is vital to the storyline. Directors have received some backlash for their portrayal of women, but they are tricking the audience. Writer for the *Badger Herald* Spencer Semonson has been very vocal about directors misrepresenting women in movies as she claimed women, "Were given guns, began to curse more frequently and took up characteristics of "strong," "intelligent,"

and “feisty.” Instead of writing women as real people, they made them marketable, friendly and frazzled (especially in romantic comedies). As long as their boobs weren’t hanging out, women were now justifiably strong”(Semonson). The directors in *The Hunger Games* show respect to Everdeen; they don’t objectify her to things like that.

In conclusion, gender stereotyping is a problem that is deeply engraved in our media today. We are blind to all the effects it has on us, as many of them we experience subconsciously. Whether you want to admit it or not, media and technology hold a great amount of power over humans. Power so great it can change and alter our thoughts and behaviors towards those of different genders, races, cultures, and even ourselves. Gender stereotyping and misrepresentation take place in the media for a plethora of reasons. Directors have biases, there's often a lack of diversity behind the scenes, and a company's driving force is to make profit. So if aligning with the audience's view on a type of person or persons is going to make them a profit, they are going to do that 99 times out of 100. Films like *The Hunger Games* are rare to come by as they challenge the typical gender norms you see quite often. Movements have been started in order to combat gender stereotyping, but yet not much has changed. Will it ever change has yet to be seen, but why not start today?

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