

When Words Fail: A Study of Language, Gender, and American Stereotypes

A SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT

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By

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ABSTRACT

This project looks at the gendered stereotypes that are projected on to males and females in the United States and how these stereotypes affect our language and speech. Students at Colorado College participated in a series of activities, free-listing and pile-sorting, to gather data on the association of everyday terms to masculinity and femininity. A common trend that appeared among the participants was the acknowledgement of gendered terms and the discomfort that came with this acknowledgement. This trend supports the gendered language that has been created within American society and the idea of toughness vs. passiveness in males and females respectively.

Honor Code:

*On my honor, I have neither given, nor received, any unauthorized aid on this assignment.
Honor Code Upheld.*

Rowan Frederiksen

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INTRODUCTION

With an idea of the role language plays in society, we can begin to understand the work within this project. This paper is framed on the sociolinguistic idea of American society. This is the study of the relation between language and society. This notion allows us to observe the linguistics between males and females, since language use symbolically represents fundamental dimensions of social behavior and human interaction. While this is simple, it is difficult to comprehend the subtlety and complexity of the reflected human behavior. The focus in this project is the significance of the association of words to masculinity and femininity, to help further our knowledge of the sexist language seen today. I am going to discuss how these issues are important to the progress towards linguistic equality, by working within the gender-gap presented between males and females. I study how these phrases and meanings contribute to this male/female dichotomy that has been established. The purpose of this research is to examine how the association of everyday words to masculinity and femininity contribute to language and gender inequality.

One of the factors contributing to the social structure of inequality is how language is used when regarding to and speaking about genders. For example, we have a man in a high authority position who disregards sexism and blatantly speaks down to women, affirming his hierarchical status. This feeds others, mostly of the same token status, the idea that it is socially acceptable to partake in furthering the gendered dichotomy and if they do not, they might be disregarded or looked down upon by their peers. Most of the time people brush off lude comments, or try to avoid the remark and carry on with their lives; but when this happens it allows the person who made the comment to believe that it was acceptable and they will most likely continue this action and continue to give in to the rising social order.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the linguistic barrier between genders and to bring a better understanding of how language in the United States contributes to the social construct of a gender dichotomy. Language is an important part of society it's a factor contributing to our everyday lives, affecting everyone who uses it. From a young age, children are unknowingly taught how to behave in a way that does contribute to a gender dichotomy. While we are coming into a new era, where people are becoming more aware of gender, they are still taught the gendered style we are comfortable with and what we think we know about gender. So with that, we are still contributing to the social structures and hierarchy.

While focusing on text, speeches, movies and media, the ways in which we have become a more gendered society have been brought into light. People in American society are empowering themselves to take a stand for what they believe in. We are in the 21st century, and there is still a noticeable power gap between biological sexes. Given our current state and government officials who see nothing wrong with adopting a sexist language, our society is trying to change this cultural norm and make it easier for genders to be seen as somewhat equal.

This paper is guided by the question; how does the association of everyday terms to masculinity and femininity contribute to gender inequality and dichotomy, focusing on the theory of androcentrism and how this notion is seen within American society. This paper will dive into the analysis of language and gender, supported by the androcentric theory. I will then discuss the methods used to conduct this project and discuss. I plan to close this paper with a discussion of how this is relevant today and how it could affect our future generations. Before any of that, I will discuss the topics prevalent throughout this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is seen as the foundation of any society, allowing people to cooperate in complex patterns (Frank & Anshen 1983). The literature presented in this paper, examines how important our language is, especially regarding the other genders. The patterns that we create linguistically are then passed down from generation to generation, for example, teaching children how to speak, when to speak, and how you interact with them, sets them up for their future and how they behave in certain situations. Gender is something that society has very intricately organized and placed at the center of the social order (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013:21). With this in mind, it is easy to use language to construct and maintain these social categories regarding sex and gender.

There is a very clear distinction between sex and gender. Sex is considered to be based on reproduction potential, or biology. On the other hand, gender is considered to be a social elaboration used to establish identity (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2013:2). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) focus on gender as a social construct, meaning that society accomplishes the differentiation that makes up the gender order. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet build on the idea that “gender is the very process of creating a dichotomy by effacing similarities and elaborating on difference...” (2013:5). The differences discussed are then exaggerated and contributed to the notion of gender. People view the two as a result of nature vs. nurture, however there is no clear answer as nature and nurture are intertwined (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013:2). A lot of the definition of what sex really is, is based on the biological differences and cultural belief on what makes someone male and female. There is an eagerness to establish basis for biological sex differences, making the public excited to soak up and support these ideas. Gender ideology is discussed further, setting up the notion that a set of beliefs governing

peoples' participation in the gender order explains and justifies that participation. These beliefs set society up for the construction of the quintessential man and woman, for example, giving into the idea that men are strong, women are weak; men are aggressive, women are passive and men are sex-driven, women are relationship-driven.

In the 1960's a wave of sexism was seen during the Women's Liberation Movement (Preece and Soden. 2011:92). Here we begin to see that sexism develops a negative connotation and is soon associated with the discrimination of women. Sexist language is used to represent and reproduce gender stereotypes, something that will be further discussed in later sections. Sexism is embedded in many aspects of language. Common themes that arise within this are the use of titles and insult terms. Insult terms result in the using of language to insult individuals. It is often seen that some of these terms "...apply to the male and female appearance, behavior and anatomy" (Preece and Soden 2011:93). The other example of how sexism is embedded within language is the use of titles, differentiating between male and female, and women's marital status (Preece and Soden 2011:95). A woman has three titles, Mrs., Ms., and Miss., whereas men only have Mr. This is seen as the default for this gender in English speaking countries. When men use titles, it is less revealing about who they are. When women use Mrs., and Miss., it shows how "sexually open a woman is from a man's point of view" (Preece and Soden 2011:95). The use of these titles also suggests that there is a norm centered on the idea of heterosexual relationships within marriage. This also allows the assumption of one's identity, and political viewpoint, showing that a woman's title predisposes her to cultural stereotypes and norms. Another interesting example of sexism within language is semantic derogation; words that refer to women as belittling or sexual connotations. Mooney et al (2011:97) uses the example of ladies and gentlemen. These two terms are considered counterparts, but are often seen as belittling towards

women. This is seen with the expression of “lunch lady”. Preece and Soden (2011:98) go on to explain that the use of lady is often meant to be polite, but is more so understood as belittling or demeaning.

Societies around the world have gendered terms when talking about objects. However, in the United States, it seems to be an issue that some people do not recognize. Moberg (2013) argues that this idea of a sexist language is taught to us from a young age. The making of a man and a woman is a process that begins before birth, simply by assigning them a gender. Then this carries on to the linguistic aspect, by naming the child according to their gender (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013:7). Creating the male-female dichotomy as the building grounds of identity. The process then continues as the child grows up, when the parents teach their kids what toys they can and cannot play with or by deciding how to dress their child (Cameron 1992). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) argue that these linguistic practices set up the baby for life, “by teaching the child to be a boy or girl, woman or man, and to see everyone else as man or woman or boy and girls” (7). In the early stages of life, parents are the ones that are predisposing their child to gender, by treating them as the respected gender. As the child grows, it doesn’t know any better, so it sticks to what it knows, supporting the gender work that they were taught. Parents teach little girls that they are only allowed to show their softer emotions, they are not allowed to be reckless and they have to behave in a way that’s socially acceptable. Parents use “more diminutives... and inner state words” (Gleason et al. 1994, Ely et al 1995) when speaking to girls (doggie, happy, sad). For their male counterpart, it is the opposite (Cameron 1992). Boys are given more social freedom; they are allowed to wander without an eagle-eye and be more reckless than girls. They are taught how to hide their soft emotion and if they do show their softer emotions, they are considered effeminate. They are encouraged to be aggressive and to

cultivate a “masculine tone” (Frank & Anshen 1983). When speaking to boys, parents tend to use more direct and emphatic terms (Bellinger and Gleason 1982). This teaches boys and girls that they *are* to be different (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013:9). There is evidence that boys and girls cry the same amount when they are younger; it is how the parents and adults respond to the children when they are crying. For example, someone might cuddle a little girl who is crying or tell a little boy that he is going to be okay and to stop crying. The behaviors that these children perform as they grow up are the direct response to how their parents treated them when they were younger (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013:9). This is the example that Eckert and McConnell use to explain that kids are taught to produce gendered behavior, and do gender for themselves (2013:9). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) go into the discussion of how kids grow up into “*big boys and big girls*” (10), not allowing them to grow into non-gendered people. They argue that children do have an important role in their development, and begin to identify as a gender as soon as they see themselves as social beings (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013:11). The authors close their argument by stating that, “as children get older, their play habits are monitored, first by parents, and eventually by peers. Parents of small children have been shown to reward their children’s choice of gender-appropriate toys (trucks for boys, dolls for girls). While parents support of their children’s gendered behavior is not always a result and certainly not a conscious effort at gender socialization, their behavior is more powerful than they think.” (2013:11). This describes the socialization of gender and further supports the idea that parents, friends, even society, teaches young children who and what they should be.

Deborah Cameron (1992), illustrates how our everyday language is formed around the hierarchies in society. Cameron (1992) goes into detail on the male dominated culture around the world and discusses how the social structure has shaped the way we view and use language.

Cameron uses theories from different sociologists and anthropologists to explain her reasoning behind our linguistic culture and social hierarchy. Cameron (1992) demonstrates the notion of a demeaning and gendered language in the United States. Men are taught from a young age to not cry, show no emotion and be tough in every situation. Being the more empowered sex, men “impose their own definition on the masculine/feminine opposition” (84). Cameron elaborates that men in the U.S. tend to take objects and define them however they please, and whatever they choose women are the opposite. For example, if men are rational, women are emotional. As the author puts it, “the negative characteristics of humanity as men perceive them are projected onto women” (84). Cameron (1992) argues that this is something that Americans are taught from a young age. This linguistic difference is an issue that has appeared to arise from our mere social constructions of gender roles. Harding, a theorist Cameron (1992) uses, argues that “speech styles are learned and practiced by the sexes in distinct contexts: for men, in political meetings and other decision making situations, for women in negotiating interpersonal relationships” (60). Men, who are thought to be the breadwinners of the house, are more likely to develop a “stronger” sense of language, as it would be needed in the business world. American society views men as the standard (Bailey and LaFrance 2016) and women happen to deviate from that standard.

Women in the U.S are told to be soft spoken and be submissive to their male counterparts. Teaching language based on gender differences causes a lot of issues for almost anyone, especially in today's society. Parents, teachers and authors teach kids how they should speak; if you're a girl, it needs to be gentle and polite, but if you're a boy, it's okay to use an aggressive tone. Cameron suggests that these issues stem from our ever-changing roles in society and with that, American men feel the need to show their dominance. Men often feel the need to

use language to put women in their place, and the gender roles presented make it easy for men to do so. Men often use talk to put on a masculine performance, proving that they are in fact men and in charge of the conversation. It is seen as a competitive performance. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013:116) build on the idea that women in the U.S. use cooperative and supportive talk, building on each others topics of conversation. Females dive deeper into personal issues and topics of conversation, where men discuss mostly sports (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013:117). It comes down to affiliation versus competition. American men are more often seen competing or engaging in other activities with their peers, where their female counterpart will be engaging in a conversation with her peers. Men are rewarded for accomplishments whereas women are rewarded based on their personality and morals, making it easier for women to carry on conversations.

This soft spoken talk that women in the U.S. are socialized to use leads into the idea of politeness and how it can be seen as a signal of cooperativeness (Mills 2003:63). It is said that American women specialize in making nice; in fact, many females see it as a job. Mills (2003) states that “Middle class females regard politeness and etiquette as their occupation and many of them feel it is of great importance...” (66). This great importance that women see in being polite, men often dismiss, finding it superfluous and unnecessary. The stereotypical view of women’s language is that it is cooperative, with women avoiding conflict as much as they can, reinforcing the idea that women are powerless compared to more forceful male speakers. Mills (2003) and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) touch on Lakoffs (1973, 1975) work, stating that it is more “lady-like” and socially acceptable for women to be polite in the U.S. American femininity has an identity tied to “politeness, self-effacement, weakness, vulnerability, and friendliness...” (Mills 2003:203). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) state that a woman is made for polite

company, “is untouched by, heavy work, dirt, detergents... no swear words, no double negatives, no heavy New York accent” (254). Wealth is considered a characteristic of polite company, central to the notion of femininity.

The idea of politeness can tie into a recurring issue in society. Sexual harassment is an issue that we see everywhere, especially in the labor force. Language in the workforce, especially regarding opposite genders, can be seen as demeaning and “in most instances of sexist language [is] unintentional rudeness stemming from peoples’ ignorance and carelessness” (Cameron 2002). In 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was created. This “is a federal law that prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, and religion.” Along with the written law comes the idea of the equality principle, that if women are joining the workforce, they will be similarly situated to men, creating “complete equality.” As shown through the years, women possess the physical and intellectual qualities needed to join the workforce. As new job opportunities rise, so does the likelihood for discrimination. With this equality claim comes the many problems the male counterparts have with females. Most “coworkers were reluctant in relating to women, social relations were strained, women had difficulty forming mentoring relationships, many of those relationships crucial to professional advancement, employees and supervisors resorted to treating women in a sexual and demeaning way, required to wear sexually provocative clothing, addressed by diminutives that undercut their credibility, and lewd comments and jokes propositioned by their coworkers” (Abrams 1989). Men feel obligated to prove their power and masculinity by demeaning and devaluing their female peers. This ties into the social domination theory, where inter-group relations focus on the maintenance and stability of social hierarchies. This male control of the workplace has allowed these male hierarchical norms in employment to

prevail. These norms shape the “inappropriate” professional demeanor, such as the time of voice, air of command and the quickness to accommodate (Abrams 1989). Women are then forced to conform to the male dominated norms in order for them to be successful in the real world.

Abrams explains that “demanding conformity to pre-existing norms is one way of protesting the access of women in the workplace...mainly because the men who constitute the workplace, like most proponents of societally dominant standards, do not recognize the partiality of their norms” (1989). These masculine norms in the U.S. workforce often lead to hostile environments. These practices are mostly directed “at women, as women and communicate a view of women that may be understood as threatening or demeaning” (Abrams 1989). Men tend to regard conduct or these sexual demands to innuendos differently than the victim at large. Some males seek to threaten women or emphasize their subordinate status, while many others want to simply protest women in the workplace. Very few men find it entertaining and/or socially acceptable. Many cases are “swept under the rug” simply because the female does not want to “stir the pot.” She already feels and understands that her presence is not wanted in the business, so reporting the issue would only cause bigger problems. Females often feel the need to prove themselves to their coworkers, and do so by keeping these issues to themselves. Women are not socialized for these occupations, resulting in most females being newcomers to almost every occupation resulting in low esteemed females and lower social status in the labor force. Comparing the two sexes, females tend to have a different attitude about sex; women are already socially and physically vulnerable, making them wary of these encounters (Abrams: 1989). Americans also live in a society where rape and sex-related violence has reached record breaking levels and the porn industry creates images of sexual coercion, objectification and violence, giving men the idea that harassment is socially acceptable. Women are more likely to interpret these sexual encounters,

verbal or physical, as coercive and less likely to view them as flattering. On the other hand, males are more likely to see it as a flattering reflection of a woman's physical and/or personal features. This supports the objectification theory; sexually objectifying the female body and equating a woman's worth with her body's appearance and sexual functions (Szymanski, Moffitt, Carr 2011).

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) examine the idea of presupposition. This is similar to stereotyping, where you have a preconceived notion about something and you stick with it. They gave an example of a teacher with a student who does exceptionally well on every assignment they are given, but their test score does not match their other assignments. The teacher expresses this to a colleague and the colleague responds with "have you given HER another test to see how SHE does?" (172). The teacher has not expressed what sex the student is but the colleague assumes that because the student had failed, it was a girl. This falls into the idea of androcentrism; that men are held to a higher standard than women and cannot fail. The student mentioned above was in fact a boy and the teacher went on to explain to the colleague that it was a male student. An obvious example that is seen in American society is that women WILL marry a man, and with that have to submit to him (173). This also falls under the idea that kids are taught from a young age what is right and wrong, and that heterosexual relationships are the norm. This feeds into the young girl's common knowledge, teaching her that this is what she is expected to be doing (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet).

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet discuss how metaphor is used to compare females and males to objects. Haste (1994) discusses the idea of sexual metaphor, "an idea that is essential to maintaining sex-gender systems that support male dominance" (180). Males are seen as active and females are seen as more passive allowing males to be represented as doers and females as

goers. This goes for recent headlines of rape incidents, where women are being blamed for being raped, leaving men out of the picture (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013: 175). People in society have the tendency to use conceptions of female-male difference to structure talk and thinking about certain contrasts, such as arts vs. sciences, biology vs. physics and so on (Haste 1994). This shows that society has gendered subjects and that if a woman or a man is to study the opposite of what is thought of them, then they are deviating from the standard. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) build off of Hastes (1994) sexual metaphor and explain how certain things are sexualized around women. They discuss that “defeated companies are conceptualized as female” (181), giving into the assumption that females are easily defeated and that men are seen as strong and successful. A theory that will be observed throughout this paper is the idea of androcentrism. This is the practice or conscious otherwise worldview of placing a masculine point of view at the center of one’s world view, culture and history, culturally marginalizing femininity, creating a societal fixation on masculinity whereby all things originate. This ideology helps maintain the patriarchal social order (Bailey and LaFrance 2016). Bailey and LaFrance introduce three key components that contribute to our gendered language. These concepts are: gender polarization, biological essentialism and androcentrism. These three concepts all revolve around each other, in the sense that “gender polarization situates men and women as profoundly different from each other, biological essentialism legitimizes this gender difference as arising from biological causes and androcentrism articulates the essence of the gender difference” (Bem 1993). Bem (1993) states from their research that this theory recognizes men not only as superior to women, but also as more typically human. This theory will contribute to the idea of how we associate gender to objects and terms, and how we speak to and about the other sexes. Androcentrism sees men as the core of society (Bailey and LaFrance 2016) and from that, is

soon embedded within language. Biological determinism and gender polarization set up society to frame women and men as opposites and androcentrism builds off these ideas and establishes men as primary and women as secondary (Bailey and LaFrance 2016). “Androcentrism positions men as the standard for a large variety of categories” (Bailey and LaFrance 2016:683), many of which women should be considered in equally.

METHODOLOGY

To analyze language and its current discourse, it is important to look at how the words within a conversation are used. Overtime, American society has managed to categorize and gender words and objects used in daily conversation. This paper presents the idea of gendered objects and how this concept frames everyday conversations. I created a survey to look at how young adults might gender objects. I will then analyze the results of the survey and compare them to the literature theory presented earlier; androcentrism. I chose to create this survey because the idea of gendered objects plays into how we view genders (Cameron 1992). This goes back to Cameron’s (1992) and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) idea that we are taught from a young age how to assign gendered categories to everyday objects. The way in which society categorizes objects allows us to view the other genders as those objects; previously discussed as objectification. This is important when it comes to talking to and about the opposite sex, especially in today’s society. We have given masculine and feminine meanings to most objects, with that, comes the idea that we are able to talk that way about the opposite gender.

To further research this subject among young adults, I created a survey and sent it to the students at Colorado College. This survey was created using Qualtrics and was completely anonymous. Since this campus is more aware of gendered terms and objects, the survey asked them to assign words to their stereotypical category. For example, if the word was doctor, they

were given choice A or B (masculine/male or feminine/female), assigning it to the category where they believe it is stereotypically seen. This survey was created to compare results to previous research on how people gender objects, a trend that was seen among texts. Since we gender objects or assume that they fall into feminine or masculine categories, that allows us to view and speak about the opposite gender in the same way. How we refer to women, calling her cupcake, shows that she is viewed as an object and never a person with individual views. Lakoff explains that “The marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in both the ways women are expected to speak, and the ways in which women are spoken of.” (1973, 45). I thought it would be interesting to study how this is prevalent among young adults and to see how it compares to earlier research.

Along with the survey, I interviewed people from various age ranges using a qualitative method to help identify items/themes within a cultural domain, this domain being terms associated with masculinity and femininity. Before asking participants to sort the words into categories (pile sorting), I asked a number of people to list words that come to mind when they think of male/masculinity and female/femininity, also known as free-listing. There are many advantages of free-listing; it is fast, brings in common terms and variation among people (Johns Hopkins University and Medley 2008). I asked participants to take however long they needed, usually no more than a few minutes, to list all of the words they could think of. They could vary from a color to a slang term used to identify males and females. This allows the opportunity to identify if there is any variation among terms associated with masculinity and femininity. Once this was completed, I examined each list and recorded the words that were mentioned in each one. I recognized how many times words were mentioned and how often they were seen among male and female participants. After recording the free-listing information, I compiled a master

list of words that were mentioned more than once and used those for the pile-sorting portion of my research. There are no restrictions for how the participant sorts the words that they are given, it is completely up to them on how they group the given words. This method allows participants freedom to choose, freedom to think outside the box and come up with their own ways of identifying terms, leaving them in control of the outcome. It examines how people could group the given terms together. The methods used during this research are more commonly seen in cognitive anthropology as data collection methods. Cognitive anthropologists study how people understand and organize everyday things that make up their world (Johns Hopkins University and Medley 2008). These methods were used to study items within a cultural domain that has been created through the use of language.

After the participant sorted through the words, a series of questions were asked. These questions made the participant think of how they completed the pile-sorting and question their thought process while completing this task. These questions ranged from “How did you sort these piles?” to “Did you notice a particular trend among these words?”. Once the participant has completed the questions, the words in each pile were recorded and used for further analysis. My data analysis focuses on the free-listing and pile-sorting activities. With this, I was able to interact with the participant and gather a better understanding of their thought process during each activity.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

During the free-listing portion of this research, a total of 328 words were produced among twenty participants. Ten males and ten females contributed to this research and were able to produce a substantial amount of terms associated with masculinity and femininity. Of the 328 words produced, 169 of them were associated with masculinity and 159 related to femininity.

Females were able to produce more words, for they came up with 217 original words. The average number of words listed per sex was eighteen for females and thirteen for males. There was a significant amount of words repeated throughout this process. Words that were seen more than once were then used for the second half of data collection. A total of 70 words were used for pile-sorting, the second part of data collection. Most of these words were seen twice, only 19 out of 70 were seen more than twice. Eight of those nineteen were repeated more than five times throughout the twenty participants (strong – 6, guns – 8, sports – 6, penis – 6, beer – 6). More repeated terms were seen to be more related to masculinity. For femininity, only three words were seen more than five times (dress – 8, pink – 6, make-up – 6).

For the second part of data collection, I asked ten individuals if they would like to participate in pile sorting. Five females and five males between the ages of 18-21 sorted the 70 terms produced from free-listing. These individuals produced a total of 85 combined piles, averaging 8.5 per person. Eight of the ten participants shared common piles, the two remaining created three piles (masculine, feminine, and neutral). The piles that were seen across each individual were related to sports (8), clothing or fashion (7), politics (8), male (5), and female (4). After the first three volunteers, people started creating a pile for colors (6). Each pile contained a significant amount of words that are closely associated with the name of each pile. Popular terms in the sports pile were baseball, athlete, athletic, football, jock, sports, muscles, cheerleader, strong. There were a total of eighteen words produced and the nine words previously mentioned, were repeated more than once. Here we begin to see how people associate sports with masculine terms, with the exception of cheerleading. For the clothing and fashion pile, nineteen words were seen and eleven of them were repeated. Common words were heels, bras, boxers, bikini, hair, make-up, pretty, shopping, fashion, dress and Broadway. Most terms

that people grouped here are more commonly noted as feminine, giving way to the notion behind femininity and fashion. Twenty-three total words were grouped with politics and violence, having fifteen of them repeated among participant piles. During the free-listing part, the words that were grouped in this pile were seen solely associated with masculinity, with the exception of one word. Common words were: power, weapons, military, war, guns, president, fight, knife, leader, protective, politics, loud, angry, earth, and distance. Politics and violence were used synonymously; people mentioned seeing the two terms as being very similar in meaning. The female pile had the largest number of total words (28) and having eighteen repeated. Words that people most associate with female are: shopping, pink, estrogen, bikini, cupcake, classy-alcohol, vagina, beautiful, dress, bras, slut, tampon, heels, boobs, period, pretty, and make-up.

The purpose for this research was to see how college students in the United States associate everyday terms with masculinity and femininity. We live in a society where we are beginning to see another wave of a women's rights movement and the university where this study occurred is very aware of gendered norms. Half of this project consisted of interviewing people, asking them to list as many terms that come to mind when given the words masculinity and femininity. This was interesting, in a way that wasn't expected. When females were asked to participate, they were eager to do so; they were talking and engaging with me while doing the free-listing and pile-sorting activities. With the males, it was the complete opposite. They seemed more hesitant to write things down, they looked at me before writing a term down, and seemed like they did not want to partake in this study. Some of their responses could be viewed in a negative light, given the position of females in American society. There was one male participant whose responses were more commonly seen among females than his male peers. They used a more negative connotation when listing masculine terms and more empowering

terms when associating terms with femininity. Some of the female response towards femininity could also be seen in a negative light, showing that society has placed a darkness on the idea of femininity. There is room for speculation however, given that a female is asking a male to associate terms to two gendered words.

During the first part of data collection (free-listing), females had more total words that they identified with the given terms. They listed a total of 217 different words out of 328. This is without repeating. The words listed were seen more frequently among the female sample size, where the males had less total words, but weren't seen as often. The words seen among females during free-listing were more vulgar and more aggressive when associating terms to masculinity. For example, the words gun, violence and weapon, were repeated among females more than males. This could be seen as women are more attuned to these kinds of word association, where men do not necessarily pay as much attention to them. Because there is a disparity in power between males and females in the U.S. this could lead to females being more aware of certain power-related terms and associations related to gender and to associate males with power. The females are the lesser sex. This could lead to them being aware of certain terms and associations to the words they were given. There were two people that put empowering terms for females and derogatory terms for males, but they were only mentioned once between the two.

For the pile-sorting portion of the research, I asked ten individuals to sort the 70 terms compiled from free-listing. Five of them were female, 18-21 years old. The others were male who were also between the ages of 18 and 21. These ten individuals produced a total of 85 piles, averaging eight and a half per person. The results from this data collection show the commonalities with associating everyday words to masculinity and femininity. Half of the people surveyed noticed a trend among the words and correlated them to male and female. Two

females sorted the given words into three piles; masculinity, femininity, and neutral. Three other participants went on to create more than three piles, but had created masculine and feminine piles among the others. Five people said they created piles based on word association. These people picked a main word and built their piles around that specific word. All but two people spread their words out before sorting this could have contributed to how they sorted the piles compared to the other participants.

There were five common piles seen among most of the participants. After the first three people, a sixth pile began to show up. These piles are consistent with the trends each individual noticed. These common piles were sports, clothing, politics, male and female, and colors beginning to show consistency after the third participant. The words seen in each pile were the same across each participant, often seen more than once among the different people. I took notes on each pile and what words made up each pile. With that, I decided to analyze the piles and the conversations after each person had finished sorting the given words. I went through the notes on each participant and noted the commonalities within the data. From here, I recorded the words in the piles across each individual. Then, the words mentioned in each pile were compared to the other participants piles and the trends within each common pile were recorded and compared to the gender of the participant.

At the end of the sorting, participants were asked a series of questions. These questions included: “What was your thought process while sorting these words?”, “What would you name your piles?”, “How did you sort these piles?” and “Were there any noticeable trends among the words that you noticed?” Before starting this whole process, people seemed hesitant to even participate in the study and once they saw the words they seemed to get nervous. There was a definite trend among the words and most people made some sort of comment about noticing the

association to masculinity and femininity. When asked how people sorted their piles, eight of them responded with word association, saying they picked a term and sorted the pile according to that term. The other two people were the only ones to sort the words according to masculine, feminine and neutral.

The last two questions had the most interesting responses out of the four questions. The last two were “What was your thought process” and “Were there any noticeable trends among the words?” Most participants noticed the masculinity and femininity trend among the words. In fact, the first thing one of the participants said was “Yes, they were gendered terms...well most of them could fit into the male and female dichotomy.” Many of them said they noticed it and then “Tried to avoid sorting words into those categories.” One participant who noticed the trend said “I saw a trend around how people relate words to social norms and the connotations that they carry. That made me aware to not generalize these words and create broad categories.” This participant still went on to sort a pile into “man” and another pile containing words more closely associated with femininity named “sexual”. At the time, I didn’t think anything of this pile, it wasn’t until I analyzed the participant’s piles and his interview that this comment really stood out to me. This participant was also one of the two people that sorted his words out of a pile in his hand. He didn’t observe the words in front of him until the very end, that’s when he noticed the trend of masculinity and femininity among the terms he had sorted.

Six people also noticed a trend associated with violence and fashion, and proceeded to comment on how they “seemed more masculine” or “more feminine” than other words that were used. This one is kind of obvious; more terms that people associate with masculinity are violent and aggressive, whereas for women the terms that were associated with them were related to fashion and clothing. This ties into how we teach our kids from a young age what to associate

with certain things. Parents spend so much time focusing on how their child should behave, react, dress, what toys they can play with, that it begins to play into the gender dichotomy that has been created.

My last participant created two piles, one labeled men and the other femininity. It seemed that though people were hesitant to even name a pile woman or girl, instead they resorted to femininity. This participant stated that “[He] was not happy with the way he sorted [his] piles and that the words made [him] somewhat uncomfortable” which this is not surprising. Most people just looked uncomfortable while sorting the words, but he was brave enough to actually say something. This participant noticed a divide between masculine and feminine words, but still created different piles for the words. In the pile he labeled politics, he put the word slut. He went on to justify why he did so and explained that “politicians sell themselves to the highest bidder.” Showing that he has a negative connotation associated with the word slut and it can be associated with people like politicians. This word did stand out from the rest, for he had president and power following slut. This supports the idea of androcentrism, that this male participant took a word that is associated so closely with females and associated it to a word that is most commonly seen relating to men and masculinity. The word slut is typically used in a demeaning way, regarding a woman’s freedom with sexual activity. This example shows that the connotation regarding the word slut has changed when associating it with masculinity. The participant had justified this by stating that “politicians sell themselves to the highest bidder”, a more common word used to describe this would be whore or prostitute, not necessarily the word slut. The word slut is used to criticize females regarding their freedom with sexual activity, not men in high power authority positions. Our focus on these words and where we associate them revolves around the idea of a male centered society. The most interesting thing about this participant was

the fact that he went into detail on why the three colors were so important. He commented that “Colors are powerful. While these colors here are associated with gender, like blue is boy and pink is girl, but red, red can be anything. Red can be an angry man or red can be a beautiful innocent woman, but really none of this matters because we are all the same color on the inside.” I thought that this was kind of interesting. No one had made a comment about the association of the colors. In the free-listing part, pink and blue were associated with femininity and masculinity respectively. Red was associated with masculinity and repeated twice during this process.

Among the ten participants, six of them were aware of the association between masculinity and femininity. Five people noticed that more words were associated with violence and fashion, most often the last two points were used synonymously. People noticed these two things and associated them together either in their piles or in their comments made when they were done with the piles. As mentioned earlier, people noticing these trends contributes to the masculinity and femininity barrier that we have created. These results that have been discussed support the stereotype of the roughness and toughness of males and the passiveness and softness related to females.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to examine how American language contributes to gender inequality and the stereotypes given to each gender. Whether we are aware of it or not, some aspect of this theory plays into American society. American English is not a language like French or Spanish which categorizes words as grammatically masculine and feminine, yet Americans do associate everyday objects and words with gendered meanings. The analysis of the pile-sorting and related interviews show that the notion of a male centered view of the world is

prevalent in today's society. In the free-listing section, there were more total words associated with masculinity, many of which were everyday terms, whereas the words associated with femininity were associated more with clothing and household activities. While there is still much to be studied regarding language and gender, this was a good way to get an idea of how this androcentric thinking and language contribute to our gender dichotomy and inequality.

FURTHER RESEARCH

While doing this study, it was interesting to see different ideas come up on how this could be done differently. Many of them were mentioned in the early stages of this research, so I tried to implement them to the best of my ability. An interesting twist to this would be to complete this study in another language. Many other languages have grammatically gendered words and most often resort to the masculine form for gender neutral references. Studying this in another language and society with grammatical gender and comparing it to an American English society would be interesting to see if grammatical gender has a bigger or different impact on gender dichotomy and gendered stereotypes.

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APPENDIX

Word Associated with Masculinity	Number of Times Repeated
Strong	6
Athletic	2
Dad	4
Big	2
Manly	2
Baseball	2
President	2
Leader	3
Guns	8
Football	4
Sports	6
Video Games	2
Muscles	9
Trucks	2
Penis	6
Beer	5
Man	2
Knife	2
Mustache	2
Power	2
Fake	2
Lucky	2
Jocks	2
Work	2
Blue	2
Bar	2
Testosterone	3
Boxers	3
War	2
Politics	2
Military	2
Fight	2
Protective	2
Red	2
Angry	2
Distance	2

Figure 1. Terms most often associated with Masculinity. Found during Free-Listing exercise.

Words Associated to Femininity	Number of Times Repeated
Pretty	4
Soft	2
Beautiful	2
Emotional	2
Cheerleader	2
Dress	8
Pink	6
Shopping	4
Athlete	2
Make-Up	6
Bikini	2
Wedding	2
Boobs	3
Classy Alcohol	2
Heels	2
Vagina	3
Rings	2
Hair	2
Bras	3
Wife	2
Legs	2
House	2
Strong	3
Fashion	2
Estrogen	2
Tampon	2
Period	2
Slut	2
Earth	2
Mother	2
Loving	2

Figure 2. Terms most often associated with Femininity. Found in Free-Listing exercise.

Pile Name: SPORTS

Word	Number of times Repeated
Baseball	8
Athlete	8
Athletic	8
Football	8
Jock	8
Sports	8
Muscles	5
Cheerleader	5
Strong	4

Figure 3. *

Pile Name: CLOTHING/FASHION

Word	Number of Times Repeated
Heels	7
Bras	7
Boxers	5
Bikini	7
Hair	5
Make-up	6
Pretty	2
Shopping	5
Fashion	7
Dress	7
Broadway	2

Figure 4. *

Pile Name: COLORS

Word	Number of Times Repeated
Blue	6
Pink	6
Red	6

Figure 5. *

Pile Name: POLITICS/VIOLENCE

Word	Number of Times Repeated
Power	8
Weapons	8
War	7
Guns	7
President	7
Fight	7
Knife	4
Leader	5
Protective	2
Politics	7
Loud	2
Angry	3
Distance	2
Earth	3

Figure 6. *

Pile Name: FEMALE

Word	Number of Times Repeated
Shopping	2
Mother	3
Pink	2
Estrogen	4
Bikini	2
Cupcake	2
Classy-alcohol	2
Vagina	4
Beautiful	2
Dress	2
Bras	2
Slut	3
Tampon	4
Heels	2
Boobs	4
Period	4
Pretty	2
Make-up	2

Figure 7. *

Pile Name: MALE

Word	Number of Times Repeated
Man	5
Weapons	2
President	2
Military	2
Beer	3
Baseball	2
Jock	2
Penis	4
Testosterone	3
Boxers	3
Dad	4
Guns	2
Mustache	5

Figure 8. *

*Figures 3-8 represent the common piles and words that were associated within each pile, presented in the pile-sorting activity.