

Gender Tutorial #3 updated Tuesday, June 13, 2006

Total Time [20:34 - approximate]

Slide 1 [01:05]

Welcome to Gender Tutorial number 3. I'm Virginia Valian and in this tutorial I'll be reviewing the impact of gender schemas on our perceptions of ourselves. Gender tutorial number 2 reviewed how we evaluate and judge others; this tutorial focuses on how we evaluate and judge ourselves. To review gender tutorial 2 quickly: gender schemas portray men as capable of independent action, doing things for a reason, and focused on the task at hand; they portray women as nurturant, communal, and expressive. The effect of gender schemas in a professional setting is underrating women's performance and overrating men's performance. Both men and women do this to the same degree. The many small examples where these differential evaluations occur result in men's accumulating more advantage over time than women do. Here in tutorial 3, I review how we see ourselves.

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Slide 2 [01:20]

Even if women were completely indifferent to the reactions of those around them, they would be undervalued as professionals. Even if women maintained their high performance, unaffected by lack of attention, and lack of positive attention, they would be likely to be underrated. It is difficult for a woman to receive the positive evaluations they objectively deserve.

Similarly, even if men were completely indifferent to other people's reactions, they would be overvalued.

But both men and women are affected by the reactions of those around them. We are all affected by people's expectations of us and tend to perform in a way that meets expectations. Even in the absence of approval or disapproval on some particular occasion, we have a conception of ourselves based in part on a history of other people's views of us.

Our self-perceptions affect what we think we are entitled to and what we aspire to be. On a day-to-day level, our self-perceptions influence whether we will speak up on a matter, whether we will negotiate, and whether we will put an idea forward. And if we make what we think is an appropriate effort and get a poor response or no response, we have to accommodate in some way to that reaction.

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Slide 3 [01:11]

One summer, my companion J and I rented a house together. A storm damaged a large tree in the back yard and a tree surgeon came to look at it. Here the three of us are, clustered beneath the tree. I am asking the surgeon questions about the damage and what needs to be done. His responses seem a little odd in some way I can't quite put my finger on. Finally I realize that I look at him when I ask my questions, he looks at J when he answers, and J mostly gazes out into space. For the entire consultation J, who has little interest in the proceedings, is silent. I ask questions; the surgeon keeps his gaze on, and

answers, the silent J.

I got the information I wanted, but I don't know what modifications – louder voice? longer speech? greater assertiveness? – I might have made in my efforts to get the surgeon to answer me rather than J. I can imagine the surgeon saying to his crew afterward, "Did you see how that woman didn't let that guy get a word in edgewise?" J noticed nothing, since he was thinking about something else the whole time.

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The backyard example illustrates some features of expectation effects. When we speak of expectations effects, we usually call one person the "target" of expectations. In the example with the tree, I was the target. The first feature to note is that the target may be unaware of the expectations. The tree surgeon's eye gaze covertly excluded me, but for some time I was unaware of exactly what was odd about the interaction. Expectations can effectively influence behavior even if they are only covertly communicated. The observer – my companion – never noticed. The tree surgeon probably was also unaware of what he was doing.

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The second aspect of expectation effects is that targets and other observers will have a tendency to behave in line with the expectations. If your opinion is not wanted, you will tend not to express it and other observers will also expect you not to express it. The tree surgeon may have thought that a man would have more of value to say about a tree than a woman.

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Third, the tendency to behave in accordance with expectations strengthens those expectations. For example, we expect women not to have, and hence not to express, political opinions. If women, frustrated because they will not be heard, do not express political opinions, the core of the expectation is confirmed. The person holding the expectation feels justified in thinking women are apolitical, since women do not express political opinions. The person does not entertain the possibility that the expectations have suppressed women's expressions. The same thing would happen if a man were the target, but men tend to be heard.

Fourth, targets can come to devalue the areas they are expected not to be interested in. Women – and men – can come to be apolitical if their political interests cannot be expressed, creating a vicious circle (**Crocker & Major, 1989; **Spencer & Steele, 1992.)

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Fifth, targets can resist expectations, especially if they have a meaningful goal. Since I was very concerned about whether a particular split branch was likely to come down on my head, I continued to ask questions despite the lack of eye contact.

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But, sixth, in resisting expectations one might modify one's behavior without being aware of it, and the modifications themselves might create negative reactions.

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Slide 9 [01:06]

Generally, others' expectations of us are conveyed very subtly, and are all the more powerful for that. An experiment with college students shows how expectations affect people's choice of tasks. Students who did not know each other were tested in male-female pairs, in different rooms, without ever seeing or hearing each other (Skrypnek & Snyder, 1982). They were asked to divide a group of jobs between them. Some of the jobs were stereotypically masculine and some were stereotypically feminine. The students could only communicate by a signaling light system.

In one condition, the experimenters told the man that his partner, who in reality was female, was male. The partner was described as independent, athletic, assertive, competitive, and ambitious. In another condition, the male was correctly told that his partner was female, but she was fictitiously described as shy, soft-spoken, gullible, gentle, and conventional. In the third condition, the man had no information about the gender of his partner.

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What happened? Men made different choices, depending on whether they thought their partner was male or female. Men picked masculine jobs most often when they believed their partner was female and least often when they believed their partner was male. We can understand that. A man who thinks he is dealing with another man – especially a man described in terms that fit the gender schemas for men – will assume that he must share the masculine tasks with the other man. A man who thinks he is dealing with a feminine woman will assume that he can – or should – take all the masculine tasks himself.

Now let's consider how the women acted. Even though they did not know what the men thought, they were affected by it. Women who were treated as men, or who were not identified at all by gender, chose masculine jobs more often than women who were treated as women. Women expressed more masculine preferences when their partners assumed they were male or did not know their gender. Given the opportunity to express a preference, women choose masculine jobs more often than if given no opportunity.

All of us change our behavior, depending on what others seem to expect of us. And gender schemas influence those expectations.

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People's continuing to work hard in the face of difficulty is in part affected by their knowledge of how others see them, their knowledge of the schemas – or stereotypes – that others have about the social groups they are members of. The phenomenon of stereotype threat has been investigated by Steele and his colleagues. For stereotype threat to occur, there must first exist a social stereotype, such as that women are worse at math than men are. Second, a member of the group must value doing well in that area. That

is, we would expect stereotype threat to affect women who want to do well in math more than women who do not care about how well they do. Finally, the members of the stereotyped group must have their membership in that group brought to their attention.
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In one experiment, Spencer and Steele asked male and female undergraduates to take a math test. Before the test, the experimenters told half the female students were told that women typically scored lower on the test than men did. They told the other half of the female students that the test was one in which no gender differences had been found. The women who had been told that women typically did worse than men scored lower on the test than male students who were taking the test at the same time. The women who were told the test showed no gender differences scored the same as the male students. One explanation for such results is that women are distracted by the information about how their group supposedly performs. Fighting off the negative stereotype has a cognitive cost, allowing fewer resources to be devoted to solving the math problem. Another explanation compatible is that, when a woman encounters a difficult problem, she interprets it as the sort of problem on which women do worse than men and stops trying to solve it.

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Slide 13 [01:10]

Expectations also shape what people believe they are entitled to. Imagine that you and a partner of the other sex perform a task together. Then the experimenter tells you privately that your partner performed worse than you did and gives you a small reward, say \$5, to divide between you and your partner. It's up to you to decide how much you will get and how much your partner will get. How will you divide it up?

Well, it depends if you're a man or a woman. If you're a man, you will probably divide the money equitably. That is, you'll divide the money according to how well each person performed. If you performed better, you'll give yourself more than you give your partner. But if you're a woman, you will probably divide the money equally, even though you have performed better.

If the experimenter tells you that your partner performed better than you, how will you divide up the reward? Here, men and women are more similar. Both men and women give the other person more than they give themselves, but men still take more for themselves than women do.

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What's behind this? Are women just nicer to other people than men are? Major and her colleagues developed a different way of doing the experiment. In one version, the participant doesn't have to divide a set amount of money. Instead, the experimenter just asks the participant to say how much the other person should receive. Now, men and women behave the same way, equitably, and to the same degree. So, there's something deeper going on than "niceness".

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Another variation of the experiment, where there is no partner, shows the differences in entitlement between men and women. The experimenter asks a participant to perform a task for a set amount of time, to work as accurately and fast as possible. At the end of the time, the experimenter asks the person to say how much money he or she should get. The experimenter gives the person an envelope with \$4 in it and the person can choose how much to take. Men take more money than women do [\$3.18 compared to \$1.95 --not said]. Men appear to think they are worth more than women think they are worth. [Major, B., McFarlin, D. B., & Gagnon, D. (1984). Overworked and underpaid: on the nature of gender differences in personal entitlement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47, 1399-1412].

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In another variation, the task is to count sets of dots in various arrangements. The experimenter tells the participant how much money he or she will get, say \$4. The participant is now asked to work for as long as seems fair for that much money, and is again asked to work as accurately as possible. Men work less time than women do [43 min vs 59 min], they accomplish less, and they make more mistakes. Men appear to set a higher cash value on their labor than women set on theirs.

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Tennis is one example of how entitlement plays out in real life. In 1991, Monica Seles argued for equal prize money for men and women in tennis tournaments. Steffi Graf said, "We make enough, we don't need more", and Mary Joe Fernandez said, "I'm happy with what we have; I don't think we should be greedy". Women appear to interpret equality as greed. In 1995, Seles, Graf, and other top players protested the Australian Open's decision to increase the size of the men's purse for 1996, so that the men's purse was \$390,000 more than the women's. But the women also pledged not to boycott the tournament – for the good of the game. Naturally, the Australian Open organizers saw no reason at that time to equalize the prize money, and the women played for less. In 2004, 2 of the 4 grand slam tournaments – the US Open and the Australian Open – had equal prize money for men and women. The other 2 – Wimbledon in England and the French Open – continue to have smaller prizes for women than for men.

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The US Open was the first tournament to equalize the prize money, and it did so in 1973, after Billie Jean King said she would not continue to compete in the tournament if it did not award equal prizes to men and women. That did it. But more than 30 years later, Wimbledon and the French Open have still not equalized their purses. And the women are still playing for less.

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Should the prizes be equal? Some letter writers at one website said men should get more money because they play longer and hit the ball harder. Others said the prize money should be equal, because men's and women's games differ but are equally prize-worthy. When a field has many different standards of excellence, that is an argument for comparable worth and, thus, comparable pay.

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Gender schemas lead to expectations of different achievements. We expect men to do well at work and women to do well at home. If the men don't do well at work, we expect them to try harder, and men expect that of themselves. If men don't do well at home, we don't expect them to try harder, and men don't expect that of themselves. The converse is the case for women.

Here's one example, from a study of attrition rates in a college pre-med program. Men dropped out of the program at lower rates than women. An analysis of the students' characteristics showed that men and women with good grades in the program were equally likely to remain in it. But among men and women with lower grades, men were more likely to continue than women were.

Men apparently draw a different conclusion about their future than women do. Gender schemas and expected gender roles can help us understand that. As Fiorentine points out, men have fewer acceptable alternatives than women do. A man who is having trouble in pre-med will not have society's and his family's blessings to become a stay-at-home father, a medical technician, or a nurse instead of a doctor. So he will try harder. A woman will have those blessings. So she will try less hard.

How much perseverance is the right amount? The odds are that we have too many male physicians who should have become nurses or medical technicians, and too many female nurses or technicians who should have become physicians.

One reason people stop doing something difficult is that they have other highly valued alternatives that are widely seen as appropriate. Gender schemas determine what that is.

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Each sex has the challenge of thinking beyond narrow gender schemas, the challenge of seeing their lives more broadly. For men, the challenge is to see a full personal life as desirable and obtainable, as contributing to self-respect rather than subtracting from it. The gender schema for men is very narrow, and excludes many of the characteristics that lead to a full, personal life. For men to adopt those characteristics – characteristics like nurturance, concern about others, and expressiveness – will require courage. To put those characteristics into action will require planning and learning. Men who want to be fathers, for example, will need to plan how to care competently for their children as well as play with them. Caring for children involves cooking their meals, bathing them, washing their clothes, taking them to the doctor, and much else besides. To do that, men will have to step outside the confines of the male gender schema. They will have to negotiate with their partner at home, and negotiate with their colleagues at work.

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For women, the challenge is to see a full professional life as something that can co-exist with a full personal life. Women have already incorporated many aspects of the male gender schema. But if women see a full professional life as conflicting with a full personal life, they may unnecessarily lower their professional aspirations. They may not

even consider the possibility that together with their partner, they could arrange their schedules to maximize the professional and personal goals that they both have. Women, like men, need to step outside the confines of gender schemas. Rather than curtailing their aspirations, women can demand a partner who will respect those aspirations and be willing and able to have a full personal life. Women will have to negotiate with their partner at home, and negotiate with their colleagues at work.

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Gender schemas limit and distort our views of other people and they limit and distort our views of ourselves. Women undervalue their labor; men overvalue their labor. Women undervalue professional goals; men undervalue personal goals. Both women and men live up to – or down to – the expectations that others have of them. To escape from unnecessary limits, both sexes need to understand how gender schemas work and challenge them.