

2011

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Recommended Citation

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Professor Cahill and Professor Aronson
AMST 3500
Thesis
December 17, 2010

Peter the Nurse and Teresa the Politician:
Exploring Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace

Gender socialization refers to the learning of behavior and attitudes considered appropriate for a given sex. Due to gender socialization people of today's society expect males and females to be intrinsically different. People are socialized to expect a man to be strong, dominant, confident, and aggressive and a woman to be kind, friendly, nurturing, and emotional. The acquisition of such specific characteristics is seen as important to certain careers. Thus, many careers are dominated by a single gender.

However, not all men have a personality to match the stereotypical male and not all women have a personality to match the stereotypical female. Therefore, a man and a woman may defy the expectations associated with his or her gender and choose a career that socialization will have deemed untraditional. Examples of an untraditional career for a woman include; a soldier, a politician, or a CEO and examples of an untraditional career for a male include; a nurse, an elementary school teacher, or a secretary. These people, that is those who are employed in professions that defy gender expectations, face consequences that I am most interested in exploring. For instance, when a man enters a female dominated profession, he often faces discrimination. Similarly, when a woman enters a male dominated profession she too suffers discrimination. However, the discrimination each person suffers differs according to his or her gender. The negative discrimination that for instance, a male secretary experiences is most

strongly generated by society in general, that is mass media, family, peers, and any institution outside of his profession. On the other hand, the negative discrimination that for instance, a female politician experiences, is most strongly generated by her coworkers and those inside her field.

When a woman is pregnant a common question to ask of her is “what are you having?”. The implied value seen upon receiving an answer to that question shows just how much is associated with gender. The interested party is insinuating that the response “I’m having a boy” means something different than “I’m having a girl”. People want to attach something to the unknown. Stereotyping allows this to happen automatically. In this example, colors, (pink or blue), names (Sarah or Dan), expectations (dominant or passive), and descriptions (handsome or pretty) are all newly associated with what is inside the pregnant woman. Though these, and similar gender associations are totalizing and not universal, they are powerful enough to be familiar. So familiar, in fact, that even at a young age people have difficulty recognizing the difference between the truth and a stereotype, between learned knowledge and their assumptions.

In April of this year, a study was conducted in order to determine the extent to which American children stereotype in accordance with gender. In this study, children were given a list of male and female names and a list of careers that both corresponded with and defied gender norms. For example, children were given traditional combinations such as David-truck driver, Debbie- housekeeper, and non-traditional combinations such as Heather-firefighter, Henry-nurse. Then, the kids were asked to make sentences incorporating each name with its corresponding career. The results followed the researcher’s hypothesis; children had difficulty forming sentences with combinations that did not follow traditional gender roles. For instance, a student

was given the combination James-babysitter and formed this sentence: “James the babysitter likes babysitting because she likes kids”. The child-author of this sentence changed the gender traditionally associated with a name like James (male) to represent a female in order to follow the espoused social role between female and babysitter. Other examples include, Mark-secretary and a corresponding sentence “Mark the secretary is also a principal,” and “Henry the nurse is a doctor too”. These sentences show that the child is attributing more power and prestige to the male name than the given profession may have previously provided. Children did not show as much difficulty making sentences that associated a female name with a male profession, but made more mistakes in these combinations than when the combination followed traditional gender norms.¹

The results of this study show that: 1. There are existing associations between gender and occupation and; 2. That these associations are less restrained for women than they are for men. If this study is reflective of society as a whole, it is to say then that society is more accepting of women in a socially envisioned male sphere than it is of men in a socially envisioned female sphere.

Society may be more accepting of women in non-gender-traditional careers thanks to the efforts and political activism of the Women’s Movement. Social scientists have categorized the Women’s Movement into two waves, the first beginning in 1848 and the second beginning in the 1960s. The movement is one of the most successful movements in United States history. It promoted awareness and changed laws. It challenged traditional sexist views and demanded equality. It pushed society to accept women in positions that they were previously not allowed to

¹ Wilbourn, Makeba, and Daniel Kee. “Henry the Nurse is a Doctor Too: Implicitly Examining Children’s

enter.

In interviews I conducted with a female attorney, a female politician, and a female soldier, each woman expressed feeling support and encouragement whenever they spoke of their aspirations to enter into their male dominated profession. Furthermore, once a member of their specific male dominated profession, they expressed feeling comfortable bringing up their careers in social situations and continued to feel encouragement from those outside of their field when speaking about their professional lives. This perceived comfort in discussing their lofty endeavors is an accomplishment of the Women's Movement. People seemed interested, even if only politely so, to know about their business and they never felt uncomfortable talking about their professions in group settings. The comfort the women felt in discussing their careers in a public sphere may not seem out of the ordinary but before the Women's Movement such conversation would be unheard of. Not only would their professional positions be unachievable, an aspiration to pursue such professions would not even be entertained.

There were strong social boundaries around a woman's traditional sphere, a sphere which limited a woman to her own house and required her to perform only mundane tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for her children. Deviance from this social norm was highly discouraged by the public. However, after a century and a half of political activism, the Women's Movement achieved the unthinkable and changed the public's opinion. Women were now able to pursue their dreams and drastically expand their perspective sphere with support and encouragement.

Though the Women's Movement drastically improved equality by giving women

opportunities men already had, society still has yet to completely abandon the traditional expectations of males and females. Though females have entered into male dominated careers in increasingly large numbers, it is still women who are supposed to come home after work and cook, clean, and do the majority of the child-rearing. These expectations produce extra stress that makes it difficult for a woman to feel comfortable pursuing male dominated careers that require both hard work and dedication.

Those who hold the limits of the traditional spheres as ideal have exploited this stress as a way of deterring and breaking women who aspire to positions usually held by men. Attorney Patricia Breslin was discriminated against in this way. Breslin was on the partner track at a law firm in Providence, Rhode Island when she left for maternity leave in 1988. When she returned to work after four weeks of maternity leave, her bosses asked her if she had looked for a job elsewhere. They also asked her “who [would] take care of the baby when she [got] sick?”. Breslin’s job, she later found out, had been taken by a male. “I thought they [her bosses at the firm] were my friends” she stated, “but obviously they weren’t.” Breslin, a capable and established lawyer, knew her rights. She knew that, thanks to another accomplishment made by the Women’s Movement, her boss’s actions provided her with the grounds to sue them for gender discrimination within the workplace. In fact, under the law it was not only illegal to terminate a woman for taking maternity leave, it was also illegal to ask her who would take care of the baby when it got sick. Thus, Breslin spoke of suing the firm when privately discussing the situation with her female lawyer friends. Her friends, however, all gave her the same advice; in Rhode Island suing for gender discrimination would be career suicide. So Breslin accepted her

replacement and found employment at another firm.² As exemplified here, the Women's Movement did not achieve the level of equality it sought. While it gave Breslin the opportunity and encouragement she needed in order to become a lawyer, and then provided her with the option of taking legal action once she was discriminated against while a member of such occupation, it failed to truly give her the inside support she needed in order to fight for her career. Though the Women's Movement put the laws and opportunities in place, they seemed to exist only in theory and not in practice.

The Women's Movement changed the surface of society but its principles had not yet been followed to their fullest potential. Similar to Breslin's experiences, United States soldier Marna Krajeski gave an interview in which she told a story that further depicted the limits of the Women's Movement. She spoke of an instance in which her superior asked her if another woman was going to be moved into their company. When Krajeski explained to him that the new soldier was actually going to be moved elsewhere, her superior replied, as she reports, "good, I'm sick of all these women getting dropped into my company". Krajeski, as an aside, commented that after having heard his reaction she thought to herself, "well, that's a hell of a thing to say to me", also said that she could have reported him. However, she, like Breslin, decided that she "didn't want to burn that bridge" and thus let the comment from her superior slide.³ This further demonstrates the fact that though women had the means, putting them into use and taking legal action was not worth the risk.

The Women's Movement made it taboo to publicly deny women equal rights but inside

² Breslin, Patricia. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

³ Krajeski, Marna. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

of corporations and other workplaces the manifestation of the progress society had seemingly adopted was limited. Men who felt that their power was threatened by women entering into their male dominated fields cleverly hid and or refused to admit their sexist views. This resulted in today's continued discrimination against women.

In an interview with Rhode Island's first female Senate Majority Leader, and now Senate President, Senator Teresa Paiva-Weed spoke of the discrimination she dealt with due to her minority status as a woman in a powerful political position. She identified the discrimination that she experienced coming from men with whom she worked with. She spoke of the fact that, in general, her male counterparts seemed to accept her authority and confidence in matters regarding social welfare, women, and families. However, "when you [as a woman] wanted to talk about finances and judicial issues they [her male coworkers] just couldn't understand why" she stated.⁴ Since women are traditionally seen as more nurturing than men it made sense that she would have some expertise when it came to dealing with families and social welfare. However, when it came to money and mathematics, a woman's authority, knowledge, and interest in these areas was not readily accepted.

Another issue of inequality Paiva-Weed experienced as a female senator occurred in what she described as "the area of emotion". Men, she said, "were allowed to yell and...throw down books but when a woman got angry or upset she was seen as a not-so-nice-word that begins with a b". She supported this claim when she described an instance in which she took an aggressive

⁴ Paiva-Weed, Teresa. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

stance while discussing a political matter on the Senate floor. In the midst of her speech a male senator put his hand on her arm and said “calm down honey”. Recalling this instance it is obvious from Paiva-Weed’s expression that she was enraged with his reaction. “No, no, no” she said defiantly, “I was not going to calm down. It was perfectly acceptable of me to react that way”. She then asserts that if she were a male she would never have received such advice.⁵ In these ways Paiva-Weed’s capabilities and motives were questioned because her male coworkers associated her with gender stereotypes. As a result, they assumed that Paiva-Weed was different than they were and should consequently be held to different standards because of her status as a woman. Still, this discrimination provides only a limited example of the ways in which women are commonly discriminated against within their male dominated places of work.

Indeed there are two additional and very popular forms of discrimination practiced against professional women that occurs specifically because of their status as women. One form of commonly practiced discrimination is known as the glass-ceiling effect. The glass ceiling is a phrase used to describe the difficulties women experience while attempting to rise to the top of their chosen professions. In an article, entitled “Still Stuck in Second”, author Anna Quindlen writes that she once had a boss who would “praise any woman he considered particularly promising by saying that someday she would be managing editor”. She wrote that her male boss thought that this was a big deal because “no woman had come close to a job that elevated”. However, the problem with what her boss considered a compliment was that managing editor was the “number two job”. “It is hard to imagine”, writes Quindlen, “that anyone would tell a

⁵ Paiva-Weed, Teresa. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

guy that he was such a star that he might rocket to the second spot”.⁶ Quindlen’s anecdote is a representation of the difficulties women have in accessing top positions and is a demonstration of the limited success that they are allowed.

Marna Krajeski also told of her experience of the glass ceiling while a member of the US army. The United States’ army has a very orderly way of promoting its soldiers. The most senior soldiers are to be promoted when a position becomes available. However, when a position opened, Krajeski was overlooked and a male soldier, who had been a member of the army for less time than she, was made her superior. She described the man who promoted this male soldier over her as “old-school”.⁷ Thus, Krajeski seemed to imply that she believes the army is moving toward gender equality and that the discrimination that she experienced may not have happened had her superior been a part of a younger generation whom she appeared to think would have had a more liberal approach and consequently would have followed the rules of promotion regardless of her gender.

A second well-known form of discrimination commonly experienced by women within their workplace is sexual harassment. Part of the difficulties in addressing sexual harassment and its effects and seriousness, is in defining the harassment itself. Sexual harassment is an ambiguous term which men and women often define differently. In an article entitled “Sexual Harassment and Masculinity: The Power and Meaning of ‘Girl Watching’”, author Beth A. Quinn writes that “some women note with frustration that men just ‘don’t get it’ and lament the seeming inadequacy of sexual harassment policies”.⁸ Particularly interesting is her discussion of

⁶ Quindlen, Anna. "Still Stuck in Second." *Newsweek* 17 Mar. 2008: 70.

⁷ Krajeski, Marna. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

⁸ Quinn, Beth A. "Sexual Harassment and Masculinity". *Men's Lives*. Ed. Michael S. Kimmel. 8th ed. Boston:

what she calls “girl watching”, a form of sexual harassment which is most common and least concerning to the mainstream. Yet, this form of harassment is still capable of major destruction. In her research Quinn conducts interviews in which she attempts to explain the opinions and perspectives of the men she interviews as they reflect upon, as coined by the men themselves, “watch girls” within their place of work. She writes that when this girl watching is “used by men as a directed act of power against a particular woman or women...in the workplace...[it] is most clearly identified as harassing by both men and women”. “Girl watching”, in its most serious and obvious form, is something that, “men seem to want everyone-the targeted woman as well as workers, clients, and superiors” to be aware of. They want everyone to know that they are looking. This need for attention and the act itself “demonstrates their right, as men, to sexually evaluate women”. This reduces the targeted woman to “a sexual object, contradicting her other identities, such as that of competent worker or leader”. Thus, this form of harassment “may trump a woman’s formal organizational power, [and] claims to professionalism”.⁹ As a result, a woman may experience difficulties feeling confident and empowered enough to take initiative at work. Unfortunately, this type of objectification is often unaddressed because women are discouraged from taking legal action and are instead encouraged to think of it as a joke and to ignore it. This under-the-radar discrimination is mirrored in the mass media’s portrayal of women.

The media may indirectly encourage forms of sexual harassment such as the previously

Pearson, 2004. 479-503. Print.

⁹ Quinn, Beth A. “Sexual Harassment and Masculinity”. *Men's Lives*. Ed. Michael S. Kimmel. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2004. 479-503. Print.

discussed, “playful girl watching”. As a result, the media is simultaneously promoting a woman’s limited access to success within male dominated fields by consistently framing women in a derogatory way. Media sources may “claim that values such as objectivity, timeliness, and prominence are what guide news stories, [however] the facts that reporters choose to emphasize often use a narrative or ‘frame’ to place them in context. Frames provide contextual cues...guide the selection, presentation, and evaluation of information...by slotting the novel into familiar categories”.¹⁰ Unfortunately, women are commonly framed in a way in which physical appearance is always included. When a woman is framed in this way the observer is guided to evaluate the information given to them with a special attention to a woman’s attractiveness. The requirement of and attention to beauty is a frame that narrows a woman’s power by using her physical appearance to contribute to her value. It is difficult for women to make progress if people pay more attention to her clothes than her words. We need only look to the 2008 Presidential election and the media’s constant comments about Hillary Clinton’s pantsuits for an example. In terms of the amount of attention the media pays towards women’s issues and prerogatives, the Women’s Movement has made significant progress. However, as stated previously the movement found success in widening a woman’s potential job opportunities but accomplished little in terms of the manifestation of vertical mobility and respect required for equality.

Similarly, the Women’s Movement has only been able to convince the media to give them the opportunity to be seen as legitimate and equal to their male counterparts but has not been able to direct that opportunity in the ways in which the movement would have hoped. Once

¹⁰ Id.

media attention is paid toward a woman with professional goals and potential, she is likely to encounter problems regarding what the media chooses to focus on. It is not likely that the woman in question aims for the majority of her media attention to be allotted to the outfit she is wearing instead of the speech she is giving, but all too often this is the reality. For example, Gloria Steinem was a prominent spokesperson for the second wave of the Women's Movement. She fought hard for equal rights and acted as a strong leader of the movement. Steinem was able to get a lot of media attention. However, Steinem was also beautiful. In 1971 Steinem landed on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine. The first paragraph of the magazine spread stated:

“In hip hugging raspberry Levis, 2-inch wedgies and a tight poor-boy T-shirt, her long, blond-streaked hair falling just so above each breast and her cheerleader-pretty face made wiser by the addition of blue-tinted glasses, she is a chic apotheosis of cool. Her cheekbones are broad and high, her teeth white and even; the fingernails on her tapered hands are as long and carefully tended as a tong chief's and any old swatch of cloth rides like a midsummer's night dream on what one woman friend calls her “most incredibly perfect body”. (Newsweek 1971, 51)

The media, though giving Steinem credit and attention, framed her in a way that included less of what she had to say and more of what she looked like. The media did not critique her intelligence, though it largely ignored it. Simultaneously, it diminished her agenda by putting her in a frame that took space away from what otherwise could have been occupied with something more fruitful to the foundation that she represented. It seems as though the media needed an excuse to pay attention to her. Thus, their excuse, in Steinem's case, and in the case of many powerful women, is that these women are also nice to look at.

Media coverage of today's women continues to use this frame. As a result, prestigious professional women find it difficult to direct media's attention to their professional agendas. In

this year's 2010 congressional election South Dakota's at-large house seat was being fought for by two women. In this important and difficult to predict race, legitimate media sources were quick to label the political race as the "battle of the babes"¹¹ and the "hottest race of the year".¹² Thus the media continues to perpetuate the importance of the female candidate's appearance by reducing their political agendas to nothing but an unwarranted beauty contest.

In maintaining this form of framing women, the media simultaneously helps to hold the traditional dynamics of gender roles. Tradition holds the model woman as someone who tends to the house and children, and the model man as someone who works in the office and fixes the plumbing. Not only does the media focus on trivial matters such as a woman's appearance, it specifically questions whether it is even possible for a woman to be capable of being both powerful and female. Hillary Clinton is a prime example of a contemporary and recognizably powerful person who is also a female. Thus, Hillary poses a threat to white men in power and the traditional roles associated with gender because of the influence she holds over a large portion of both male and female citizens. However, because Hillary attempts to defy the ingrained ideas of a woman as passive and man as aggressive, she faces harsh discrimination posed by media outlets whose audience is conceivably those who are threatened by a woman who holds so much power.

On websites like Facebook.com where any member of the public can join and write what they please, people have posted and others have shown their support for such statements as,

¹¹ "South Dakota's 'Battle Of The Babes': The Democrat 'Mama Grizzly' vs. 'The Next Sarah Palin'" *Breaking News and Opinion on The Huffington Post*. 23 Aug. 2010. Web. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/23/south-dakotas-battle-of-t_n_690977.html>.

¹² Drake, By Bruce. "The 'Hottest' Race? Kristi Noem vs. Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin for S.D. House Seat." *Politics News, Elections Coverage, Political Analysis and Opinion*. Aug. 2010. Web.

“Hillary can’t handle one man; how can she handle 150 million of them? Send her back to the kitchen to get a sandwich. She belongs back with the dishes, not upfront with the leaders”¹³.

These posts illustrate the media’s continued promotion of the value of traditional gender roles by maintaining the construction of the conventional female sphere. This holds true not just for media produced by amateurs, as represented by Facebook, but is also demonstrated by professional media commentators who share this ideology.

Rush Limbaugh is an example of such a professional. Limbaugh, a popular and influential radio host, has spoken about Hillary Clinton and referenced “Clinton’s testicle lockbox”, insinuating that the gender norms defied by Hillary are so overwhelming that she must actually be a male in disguise. In support of Limbaugh’s opinion is MSNBC’s Tucker Carlson who says, “there’s just something about her that feels castrating”. The reference to castration is a direct example of the threat that men feel when confronted with a powerful woman. Carlson seems to say that he can no longer be a man when Clinton is in the room because she is too overwhelming. In making such comment he attempts to discourage females from following in Hillary’s footsteps for fear that if they do so they will no longer be attractive to men who will not know how to handle them. Guests of Carlson’s show further illustrate this point. A former spokesperson from the Republican National Committee, Clifford May, said that “if Clinton is going to appeal to women for support on the basis of her gender, at least call her a vaginal-American”¹⁴. Hence these men refuse to accept the fact that a person can be both powerful and female and thus insult her by publicly expressing disgusting ideas of her identity in order to

<<http://www.politicsdaily.com/2010/08/03/the-hottest-race-kristi-noem-vs-rep-stephanie-herseth-sandl/>>.

¹³ Moyers, Bill. "Bill Moyers Journal . Transcripts | PBS." *PBS: Public Broadcasting Service*. Web. <<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/12072007/transcript1.html>>.

excuse her ability to dominate.

The opinions and expressions of these men are an extreme representation of what is known as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is defined by some gender scholars as “‘the culturally idealized form of masculine character’ that emphasizes ‘the connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness,’ as well as ‘the subordination of women’ and ‘marginalization of gay men’”.¹⁵ The overemphasis on the competitive male as model is the result of a threat to power. The threat to the United State’s tradition of white men in power and thus unequal power distribution has only been legitimately acknowledged in relatively recent history. The Women’s Movement is an example of a minority movement that has been seen as a legitimate challenge to the traditional views that held all power in the hands of white men. In our nation’s past, power was limited to white, middle to upper-class men, whose authority was absolute and if ever questioned, such questions were promptly ignored.

The Women’s Movement pressed men to recognize women as being legitimate competitors for this power, thus attempting to redistribute and consequently take away power from white men. Similarly, the Gay Rights movement also pushed to redistribute power, break conventional ideas of family and gender roles, and recognize the capabilities of the gay community as equal to the capabilities attributed to society’s power-holding heterosexual white males. So, minority groups threatened the previously assumed privileges held by white men by making their presence known in the public sphere and demanding their rights. As a result “at this historical moment... hegemonic masculinity has been partially destabilized by global economic

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Nylund, David. "When in Rome: Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Sports Talk Radio." *Men's Lives*. Ed. Michael S. Kimmel. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2004. 479-503. Print.

changes and by gay liberation and feminist movements”.¹⁶ Women and homosexuals presence in the public sphere make power-holding men feel an immediate need to defend their heterosexuality.

A product of this perceived need to defend traditional gender roles is the media’s endorsement of hypermasculinity. One definition of hypermasculinity is, “the belief that the ideal manhood lies in the exercise of force to dominate others”.¹⁷ In an article entitled, “When in Rome: Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Sports Talk Radio”, author David Nylund argues that media, in the form of sports talk radio, is one outlet for the “embattled White men seeking recreational repose and a nostalgic return to a prefeminist ideal”.¹⁸ Nylund describes these “embattled White men” as men who feel their power is being threatened by minority groups and their fight for equality, thus pressuring white men to step aside. Nylund writes that “mediated sports...function largely to reproduce the idea that hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality are natural and universal rather than socially constructed”.¹⁹ Furthermore, he states explicitly that “the sports media industry seemingly provides a stable and specific view of masculinity grounded in heterosexuality, aggression, individuality, and the objectification of women”.²⁰ This is sustained by television commercials, family sitcoms, films, internet forums, etcetera, which use this version of the American male as a model for their leading and supporting male

¹⁶ Id.

¹⁷ Kimmel, Michael S. "Men and Masculinities: a Social ..." *Google Books*. Web. <[http://books.google.com/books?id=jWj5OBvTh1IC&pg=PA418&dq=define hypermasculinity&hl=en&ei=vKcGTePGKcG88gbf4r3BCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=define hypermasculinity&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=jWj5OBvTh1IC&pg=PA418&dq=define+hypermasculinity&hl=en&ei=vKcGTePGKcG88gbf4r3BCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=define+hypermasculinity&f=false)>.

¹⁸ Nylund, David. "When in Rome: Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Sports Talk Radio." *Men's Lives*. Ed. Michael S. Kimmel. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2004. 479-503. Print.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ Id.

characters. Thus the popular attempt to maintain this ethos makes it extremely difficult for heterosexual white men to publicly express any deviations from this point of view.

After a century and a half of political activism women have gained credibility and recognition providing them with access and acceptance into an enlarged sphere. It is now normal for women to have a career outside of the home and it is because women fight against condemning stereotypes that a woman's sphere is expanding more than its male counterpart. Women show support for one another through organizations they have set up to encourage each other in their professional endeavors and by remaining a politically active group that is recognized in the public sphere. Since this is true, women generally feel more comfortable entering into male dominated careers. There is evidence that women will line up for male associated careers when one is available but that is not true for men.²¹ Instead, men have rallied against traditional sphere expansion.

The men who seek to work in an unconventional field are often considered “failures... [or] sexual deviants”.²² This can be blamed on the portrayal of the hypermasculine as an ideal representation of the male. This model condemns men to the sphere that follows tradition and ostracizes those who fight its boundaries. The encouragement women have to expand their horizons is converse to the discouragement men receive upon seeking to do the same. Thus, it is more favorable to say “my daughter, the physician,” than to say ‘my son, the nurse’”. Society does not yet accept men in untraditional roles.²³

Nurse Fontaine demonstrated society's close-mindedness when he said that his guidance

²¹ Williams, Christine L. “The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the “Female” Professions.

²² Id.

counselor and some of his peers discouraged his expressed aspiration to become a nurse and questioned him as to why he did not consider pursuing a career as a doctor instead. Once Fontaine was able to overcome these initial hurdles and disregard questions and lack of outside support, and become a nurse, he was then forced to deal with stranger's assumptions that, since he was a male nurse, he must be gay. He reported that on multiple occasions he was asked if he were gay or if he was "a sissy".²⁴ On a blog dedicated to supporting male nurses, some men have posted that they avoid talking about their careers in social settings in order to avoid negative assumptions and judgments.²⁵ The hesitation men in non-gender-traditional careers take to engage in conversation about their profession is comically exemplified in the popular film *Meet the Parents*. In the film, actor Ben Stiller plays Greg, a male nurse who gets engaged and goes to meet his new in-laws-to-be. Greg's soon-to-be-brother-in-law, asks him what line of work he is in and Greg replies, "I'm in healthcare", specifically avoiding saying that he is a nurse. Regardless, Greg's father-in-law-to-be says it for him, that Greg is a male nurse. To this Greg awkwardly responds, "that's right...thank you", clearly uncomfortable for having just been called out for something he seemed he would rather not talk about. Other conversation throughout the movie shows the father-in-law speaking condescendingly about Greg's choice of career. The fact that Greg attempts to avoid talking about his professional life shows us that society's preconceived notions about men in non-gender-traditional careers are not positive.²⁶ However, viewers of the film are supposed to recognize the disapproval held by the father-in-law, and to empathize with Greg. They should understand and suspect that the blatant

²³ Id.

²⁴ Fontaine, Peter. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

²⁵ "Blog Forum." *Male Nurse Magazine*. Web. <<http://www.malenursemagazine.com/>>.

²⁶ *Meet the Parents*. Dir. Jay Roach. Perf. Ben Stiller Robert De Niro. Universal Studios, 2000. DVD.

disapproval from the father-in-law is expressed because he is an older male, more prone to be keen of traditional roles, and that the movie is a comedy and all of the harsh criticism is meant in good fun. Further, viewers are supposed to see that Greg's occupation is not normal for a man, but that being abnormal might be okay. His occupation makes for an uncomfortable conversation, so humor can ease this discomfort. The complicated reading of this satire is a reflection of mainstream society's confusion.

This confusion is exemplified by the feminist scholar David Nylund who writes that he enjoys listening to sports radio. He writes, "I enjoy listening to the program even though I am aware of the sexist and homophobic themes. Pleasure provides a double-edged sword: It provides opportunities for relaxation, bonding, but also makes sexist and homophobic content seem more innocent and easier to dismiss or laugh off". Thus he concludes that "pleasure cannot be valorized per se but needs to be critically examined to determine whether the pleasure of a given moment in the text of the program is progressive, emancipator, or destructive".²⁷ So it is difficult to say what can and should be taken as a joke or as a seriously hurtful and derogatory comment.

Men are not the only ones confused about what is appropriate, destructive, or productive. Some women, whether out of habit or purpose, heavily reward men who are the minority in their career, while simultaneously giving up powerful positions usually occupied by other women. Females, in great numbers, allow for the small amount of men that join them in their gender-traditional-profession, to ride what is known as the counterpart of the glass ceiling. The glass escalator is the phrase used to describe a generally accepted theory in which "men are given fair-

²⁷ Nylund, David. "When in Rome: Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Sports Talk Radio." *Men's Lives*. Ed. Michael S. Kimmel. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2004. 479-503. Print.

if not preferential treatment in hiring, promotion decisions, are accepted by supervisors and colleagues, and are well-integrated into the workplace subculture...subtle mechanisms seem to enhance men's position".²⁸ The advantages of being a male in a female dominated field were expressed in the interview I conducted with nurse Fontaine. Fontaine was made president of his all women nursing school because, as he said, "I was the only male in my class and I think that it was assumed that because I was a man I would take the leadership role and be president of my class". He admitted, however, that he was uninterested in the position and that many women who were interested would probably have made better presidents of the class.²⁹ Women are "generally eager to see men enter 'their' occupations" though they are simultaneously frustrated by the "apparent ease with which men advance within these professions, sensing that men at the higher levels receive preferential treatment which closes off advancement for women".³⁰ However, it may be the case that, as nurse Fontaine stated, men "do not become nurses because their mom was a nurse, they become nurses because they are passionate about the career".³¹ Fontaine seems to suggest that without many male role models, and without outside encouragement, men who enter female dominated professions must be completely committed to their professional endeavors.³² Men have to fight strong adversity and go against the conventional ideals many of their friends hold before even entering into a female dominated profession. They must be strong individuals prepared to face adversity. The necessary passion and drive may legitimately push men to the top positions because they are already committed and sure that this path is right for them before they even begin.

²⁸ Williams, Christine L. "The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions.

²⁹ Fontaine, Peter. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

³⁰ Williams, Christine L. "The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions.

³¹ Fontaine, Peter. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

³² Id.

There are also some disadvantages that males may experience within female dominated fields. For example, nurse Fontaine expressed that his female coworkers sometimes did not allow him to do ob-gyn rounds even though he was qualified to do so.³³ Other male nurses expressed being called upon to “help catheterize male patients or to lift heavy patients”. Male librarians tell stories of being asked to “lift and move heavy boxes of books because they were men” and a male teacher told of being asked to change tires, fix a computer, and reported receiving a larger proportion of children with discipline problems because he was a male and could handle it. Despite some negative aspects due to being a male in a non-gender-traditional field, many men said “they liked being appreciated for the special traits and abilities (such as strength) they could contribute to their professions”.³⁴ Women then echoed a man’s confidence by seeking them out to do things that they, as women, seemed unable to do for themselves.

This project focused on males and females who are members of a non-gender-traditional career. The people that I interviewed, and most of the people who were subjects in the published studies that I referenced, were men and women who were straight, white, and middle to upper class. This limits the conclusions I can make as I did not include all people who make up the American population.

I can, however, summarize my own findings as I believe they hold true for a larger portion of society. Thus, it can be said that a woman is encouraged to pursue any path she feels passionate about even if that path leads her to a place traditionally occupied by men. Once a woman has landed a career in a non-gender-traditional field, society deems her successful. Since she is seen as successful it becomes acceptable for the media to frame her in a way that belittles

³³ Fontaine, Peter. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

her. She is scrutinized and reduced to an evaluation of her appearance. Often she is objectified in both the public sphere and her place of work. At work, her coworkers are comfortable with questioning her intelligence and authority, whether directly or indirectly due to her status as a woman. Women react to this discrimination in two ways. Either, they accept a coworker's discrimination and the media's attention to their appearance as an expected trade off in their quest to excel, or they take the matter personally and consider fighting for their rights. However, too often women only consider fighting for their rights, but give up this choice to the assumed reality that they will never be able to be promoted or become successful if they take legal action or make their complaints public. They are afraid that people will react negatively and accuse them of whining and embodying the stereotype of an emotional or bitchy woman. This inability to take advantage of what the Women's Movement has formally achieved shows the movement's limited accomplishments.

For the man in a field traditionally dominated by women, the difficulties he experiences are different. Unlike women, who are encouraged by the public to move into male dominated careers, men are more likely to be discouraged from moving into female dominated careers. This is true because men have not yet organized themselves to lobby for social acceptance. Instead, men have largely held on to traditional notions of masculinity and power. Holding these traditional roles out as having the utmost value creates an environment in which it is difficult to accept males who go against this entitlement mantra. The public will assume the stereotype that the man is gay and his masculinity and worth will be questioned. It is interesting to note however, that men in non-gender-traditional careers, while not exactly accepted, are deemed

³⁴ Williams, Christine L. "The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions.

deviants in what is likely meant to be taken in a light-hearted way. For example, in *Meet the Parents*, male nurse Greg is made fun of. But, the audience is supposed to empathize with him and is meant to come away from the movie thinking, among other irrelevant thoughts, that it is actually okay for a man to be a nurse.³⁵ This attitude may hold true due to the Gay Rights movement. This movement has made great progress in terms of liberating people and creating awareness about homosexuality. The Gay Rights movement seeks to educate the public, believing that the more educated people become the more likely they will be to understand and accept them. This is demonstrated in the public sphere since there has been, as a result of the movement, an increase in public acceptance of homosexuality and LGBTQs. Consequently, men who are members of gender-non-traditional careers are lumped into this group that is gradually becoming accepted. However this acceptance does not address the fact that the assumed homosexuality of a male who is employed in a non-gender-traditional career, may not be accurate. Nonetheless, since it is increasingly socially unacceptable to be overtly homophobic, it may be increasingly unacceptable to be overtly discriminatory against men who choose careers outside of the gender norm. As a result, although the assumed homosexuality may still persist, this assumption may not be as difficult to deal with as it was prior to the start of the Gay Rights Movement.

Regardless of society's liberal progression, a value in tradition remains ever-present and the dominant ideal promoted by the public. That is, the stereotypical powerful and heterosexual male is still ideal. This ideal is promoted by the media which supports the view of the male as the

³⁵ *Meet the Parents*. Dir. Jay Roach. Perf. Ben Stiller Robert De Niro. Universal Studios, 2000. DVD.

dominant gender. This belief is further reflected upon men who are members of non-gender-traditional careers. Men who overcome society's assumptions and discouragement, and still decide to enter into non-gender-traditional careers, experience the greatest amount of discrimination from those who assume that he is less than because he has chosen a career that does not echo masculine stereotypes. Thus, he is believed to be encouraging a growing threat to traditional heterosexual male domination. However, if a man can handle this negativity, his experience within his non-gender-traditional career will be mostly well-rewarded. In fact, a man will be disproportionately rewarded and promoted solely because of his status as a male. This demonstrates the fact that traditional gender roles and the values associated with those roles and norms remain triumphant. Men and women alike prefer to see men in positions of power.

Despite this, hope for the future remains. Nurse Fontaine specifically said that those who most often asked and made obvious their assumptions of his homosexuality were "older men".³⁶ In *Meet the Parents* the character that is most vocal about his disapproval of Greg's occupation as nurse is also the oldest male character in the film.³⁷ Likewise, Krajeski, the female soldier stated that the source of the discrimination she experienced could be attributed to a major who was "old school".³⁸ So there appears to be a consensus that it may be an older generation that expects and accepts only gender roles that follow tradition, but that discrimination would be unacceptable if it is derived from someone of a contemporary or younger generation. Therefore, there exists an optimistic outlook for the future of gender equality.

³⁶ Fontaine, Peter. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

³⁷ *Meet the Parents*. Dir. Jay Roach. Perf. Ben Stiller Robert De Niro. Universal Studios, 2000. DVD.

³⁸ Krajeski, Marna. "Gender Norms and Discrimination in the Workplace." Personal interview. Spring 2009.

