

The Stereotype that Women are Crazy and its Presence in our Society and Media

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Abstract

From ancient times to the present-day, the stereotype that women are crazy/hysterical has held a spot in societies and media platforms all around the world. This paper will start out by briefly describing the stereotype in general, as well as the ideas that form around this sexist viewpoint. It will then transition over to the origin of the stereotype, and how it has progressed throughout history. In addition, this essay will go on to analyze how the concept of women being crazy/hysterical is exhibited in a variety of media platforms, including songs, movies, television shows, and commercials. After, the paper will describe how we set up a survey-style experiment to test the validity of our stereotype, and how we came to the conclusion that the idea of women being crazy/hysterical is still very prominent in our society; quotes and facts will also be included to help support that claim. Finally, this essay will discuss our prediction that this sexist stereotype will diminish in the next few decades, specifically focusing on how feminism is a growing movement, women are tolerating the use of this stereotype less, and how parents are raising their children differently (and for the better).

Keywords: *stereotype, women, crazy, hysterical, sexist, feminism*

The Stereotype that Women are Crazy and its Presence in our Society and Media

The stereotype that all women are crazy or hysterical is exhibited in both the media and within our society. Making assumptions like this is considered by many as misogyny towards women, and has even lead to issues like rape and the diagnosis of mental illness. This topic ranges from crazy ex-girlfriends, to brides, to famous female icons, and to just average women. Just because a woman shows her emotions, that does not mean she is crazy or hysterical. However, society does not see it this way, and the media helps to encourage this false representation of women and this sexist stereotype.

History of the Stereotype

The stereotype that women are crazy/hysterical has existed in societies all over world for thousands of years. However, this stereotype has changed and been interpreted differently as it has progressed through history. In ancient times, hysteria was considered a medical/mental disorder that a woman would have depending on the amount of sexual activity she participated in. At first, ancient Egyptians believed that “spontaneous uterus movement” (or more modernly known as an “orgasm”) was the cause of hysterical disorders, according to Tasca, Rapetti, Carta & Fadda (2012). Then, later on, beliefs changed and the people of ancient Greece thought that the cure to hysteria was for women to have more sex in order to fix the “melancholy uterus”.

Thus arose the idea of a female madness related to the lack of a normal sexual life: Plato, in *Timaeus*, argues that the uterus is sad and unfortunate when it does not join with the male and does not give rise to a new birth, and Aristotle and Hippocrates were of the same opinion (as cited in Tasca et. al, 2012, para. 9).

Also, referring to the views of Hippocrates, a Greek physician of the time, he says:

He asserts that a woman's body is physiologically cold and wet and hence prone to putrefaction of the humors (as opposed to the dry and warm male body). For this reason, the uterus is prone to get sick, especially if it is deprived of the benefits arising from sex and procreation, which, widening a woman's canals, promote the cleansing of the body. And he goes further; especially in virgins, widows, single, or sterile women, this “bad” uterus – since it is not satisfied - not only produces toxic fumes but also takes to wandering around the body, causing various kinds of disorders such as anxiety, sense of suffocation, tremors, sometimes even convulsions and paralysis (as cited in Tasca et. al, 2012, para. 12).

Both of these quotes reflect how the people of that time lacked the medical knowledge or technology to accurately diagnose or treat hysteria, since the idea of hysteria being caused by an inadequate sex life is nothing but sexist, misogynistic, and ridiculous. In addition, the reasoning behind hysteria in women continued to change as time progressed, but it didn't become any more accurate. According to Castlemen (2013, para. 3-4):

Until the 20th century, American and European men—including physicians—believed that women did not experience sexual desire or pleasure. They believed that women were simply fleshy receptacles for male lust and that intercourse culminating in male ejaculation fulfilled women's erotic needs. Women were socialized to believe that “ladies” had no sex drive, and that duty required them to put up with sex in order to keep their husbands happy and have children. Not surprisingly, these beliefs left an enormous number of women sexually frustrated. They complained to doctors of anxiety, sleeplessness, irritability, nervousness, erotic fantasies, feelings of heaviness in the lower abdomen, and wetness

between the leg. This syndrome became known as “hysteria,” from the Greek word for uterus (as cited in Castlemen, 2013, para. 3-4).

This quote reflects how men from that time period believed, and how women were encouraged by society to believe, that girls had no sex drive and were basically just there for men to use. Due to receiving no relief for their sexual frustration, women started to exhibit certain “emotional” symptoms that got misinterpreted as hysteria. This could have added onto the stereotype that women are crazy/hysterical, when really they were just displaying perfectly valid emotions. Furthermore, this stereotype continued as time went on, constantly being tweaked and added to to create the stereotype that it is in our world today. Societal norms play a big role in how humans behave and think, as well as help create the stereotypes that our world is plagued with. In fact:

The GEAS formative research showed that gender norms reinforce different expectations for boys and girls. For example, across all study sites, boys are encouraged to be tough, strong, and brave and to demonstrate heterosexual prowess. Girls are taught to be nice, polite, and submissive and to accentuate their physical beauty while maintaining their modesty (as cited in Chandra-Mouli, Plesons, Adebayo, Amin, Kraft, Lane & Brundage, 2017, para. 8).

If society teaches young boys and girls, who are very susceptible to outside influences, to act and think a certain way that makes them distinguished from one another, as well as discourage them from doing things that are against societal norms, they are more likely to grow up believing stereotypes affecting each gender, such as “women are crazy/hysterical”. A lot of what we know and what we believe was introduced to us when we were children, so it is very likely that the

people who genuinely think that all girls are crazy are the same ones who grew up believing that stereotype, whether it was imposed on them or they chose to have that opinion on their own.

Analysis of Stereotype Today in the Media

Today, the stereotype that all women are crazy or hysterical has been incorporated into modern culture in a variety of ways, whether it be intentional or not. Shown in music videos, movies, TV shows, and even commercials, this assumption of women is commonly represented in our society, and it is also something that many people tend to believe.

Music Videos

One common example of this present-day media source is the music video created for the song “Blank Space”, a popular single released by Taylor Swift. Within the video (“Blank Space,” 2014), Taylor is shown in a happy relationship with a nice man until she accuses him of cheating on her. Rather than remaining calm about the situation, she decides to go a different route. Taylor goes ballistic, throwing things around and smashing the man’s car with a bat. These are only a few of the many destructive acts carried out. In modern times, if a man cheats on a woman, it is assumed that she will go crazy and in some way get revenge on him, however that may be. Women are portrayed as overly-jealous and insane in times of vulnerability in situations like this, which further develops the stereotype that women are crazy.

Commercials

In addition to this, a Christmas sale commercial created by Target involved a woman going shopping during the holidays (“Crazy Target Lady-Montage,” 2010). The woman was seen in a very intense mood before her shopping trip. She was “warming up” in a sense; she was doing push-ups, lifting weights, and timing herself while she did sprints. She had no obvious aspects of

self control. As ridiculous as it seems, when it comes to shopping during the holidays, it is presumed by many that all women lose control, especially when sales are involved. This adds to the sexist concept of all women being crazy, which is a very common stereotype when it comes to women and shopping.

TV Shows

Another occurrence of this stereotype is in TV shows. For example, in a *Desperate Housewives* episode called “The Pilot”, a woman named Lynette is shown in an overwhelming situation (“*Desperate Housewives*,” 2004). She appears to be taking an important phone call while her three young children blare music, run around the house, and make a mess. This eventually leads to a daydream of her conducting insane behavior; Lynette loses her mind, throwing dishes around the kitchen while screaming and throwing a massive fit. Typically, in stressful or overwhelming situations, women are believed to lose self control and lash out for no particular reason. While this can happen, that does not necessarily imply that all females react in this way. This assumption comes into effect especially when regarding mothers who have multiple children, and this entire concept further develops the stereotype that women are crazy.

Movies

As a final example of this stereotype in modern culture, a movie titled “*The Roommate*” shows a young college woman named Sara and her new roommate named Rebecca (“*The Roommate*,” 2011). At the beginning of the movie, the two have a normal friendship, until Rebecca becomes dangerously obsessive over their friendship. This obsession motivates her to sabotage her life, from killing her cat to harming and threatening her friends. This movie is a great example of girls being portrayed as crazy when it comes to friendships. Women can be seen as

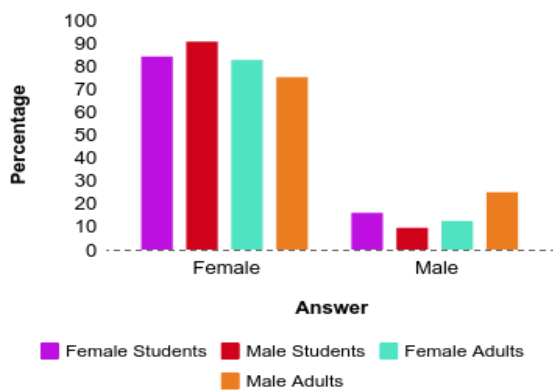
being very needy for attention and obsessive/protective over what's theirs, which is exhibited in multiple movies. Competitiveness between friends can cause unstable and emotional relationships; however, that does not necessarily mean females will resort to murder and other psychotic actions.

Experiment

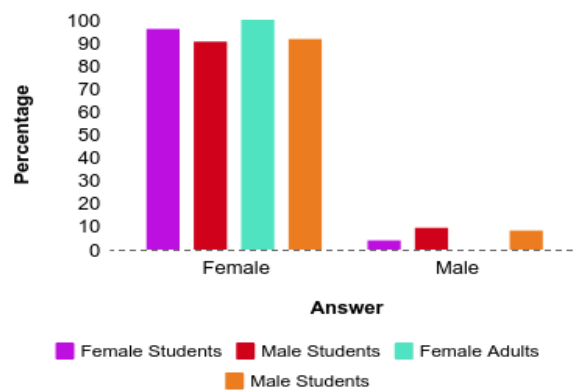
For our experiment, we decided to create a survey with questions that allowed our subjects to decide if females or males were more likely to express a specific quality or trait. We predicted that this experiment would prove our stereotype to still be very prominent in society. Based on our results, we found that our prediction was correct and that this stereotype is still prevalent in our world today. Almost all of the subjects in this experiment said that women are more likely to be crazy than men, which proves that many people still believe that this stereotype is around. In the survey, we started off by asking general questions, such as “Do you play any sports?”, “Do you read?”, and “Have you ever been in a relationship?”, to prime the subjects into thinking that this was a generic survey. As the survey went on, the questions became more centered on our stereotype. For example, out of males and females, we asked, “Who is more likely to lie?”, “Who is more likely to get jealous?”, and “Who is more likely to be crazy?”. When conducting this experiment, we decided to give the survey to 70 individuals, including students and adults of both genders. We picked these four main groups so that the answers came from a variety of people and weren't biased in any way. The survey was given to students in our third and sixth hour, as well as to multiple teachers and family members. In every group that we surveyed, it was concluded that women are more emotional, more likely to overreact, and more likely to be crazy. As seen in the piktochart, 81% of male students and 68% of female students said that females are more likely to be crazy. Out of all the female students that were surveyed, 96% of them said that females are more

emotional than men, and 90.5% of male students surveyed said that females were more emotional as well. The results of the experiment proved that this stereotype is still common today. A majority of the subjects also said that men were more likely to lash out, yell, and be jealous. These outcomes show that although many people still believe the stereotype that women are crazy, many people also believe that men have their share of craziness within a relationship.

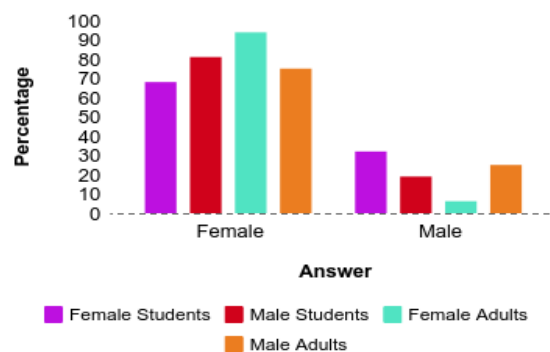
Who is More Likely to Overreact?



Who is More Likely to be Emotional?



Who is More Likely to be Crazy/Hysterical?



Quotes and Facts to Support Validity

Today, there are many real-life incidents that show how people still believe the stereotype that women are crazy/hysterical. Recently, producer Harvey Weinstein was accused by multiple females in Hollywood for sexual assault. One star in particular brought this problem up within the media by tweeting, “I told the head of your studio that Harvey Weinstein raped me. Over & Over I said it. He said it hadn’t been proven. I said I was the proof.” (Personal Communication from Twitter, Rose McGowan, October 12th 2017) Actress Rose McGowan tweeted multiple tweets that day claiming that producer Harvey Weinstein raped her. According to Erbland (2017), Chief executive of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, claimed that there is no proof to suggest that Weinstein ever raped her, and said that McGowan was crazy for making this allegation. In an attempt to silence Rose, Amazon tried to give her \$100,000 (para. 2). She rejected the offer, and it led to more angry tweets and arguments. Many people in the film industry have called Rose “crazy” and “insane” just because she is voicing her opinion. These actresses who are finally standing up to their sexual abusers are being deemed as attention seekers for wanting justice for themselves. Male executives in the film industry shout these names at female actresses even though they know the truth of the situation; they just want to protect their ego and their name. According to Ali (2011), there is a tendency for men to make unnecessary comments that may be sensitive to women. However, their only response to a woman’s hurt feelings is that they were “just kidding” and that they are “being sensitive.” When women get their feelings hurt over certain comments made by men, they tend to be called “too sensitive” and not able to “take a joke,”. This leads to the idea of women being crazy, when in reality, women just don't want their feelings getting hurt (which doesn’t seem like that unreasonable of a request). Women who serve our country are treated unfairly and called liars.

Those who are victims of rape are treated with personality disorders for coming forward and telling someone about their experience. This makes it difficult for them to get a job, and even obtain child custody. Unfortunately, things like this occur every day to women all around the world. According to Marcotte (2016), the society we live in today is so accustomed to the idea that women are “crazy liars”, that we are blinded from seeing the problems that it really causes (para. 3).

Predictions for the Future

Despite our experimental results showing that the idea that women are crazy is still very prominent in our society, we predict that this stereotype will diminish in the next few decades due to growing social trends. First of all, one thing that will cause this stereotype to diminish is the fact that women are tolerating the use of it less. According to Creagh (2017), “The younger generation of female MPs are saying loud and clear – when it comes to sexism – we will apply zero tolerance” (para. 13). As society advances, more and more people are standing up for the rights and proper treatment of women. In the past, men would make sexist comments towards women and women would just take it without saying anything, since that’s what society normalized. However, now of days, less and less women are staying silent; they are sticking up for themselves and defending what is right. This ties into another reason why the stereotype that women are crazy will deteriorate in the next few decades: feminism. Feminism is a growing movement; as more people fight for the fair treatment of men and women and their equality, more people notice their efforts/ideas and start to join the feminist movement too. “Feminism on a whole has had a positive impact on society; it has been a dramatically successful social movement. It has changed women's expectations and perspectives on their lives” (“Feminism and its impact on society”, 2015, para. 11). Finally, the stereotype that women are crazy will diminish in the next few decades because of how parents are

raising their children differently (and for the better). As feminism becomes more popular, parents are starting to teach their kids the importance of treating both genders fairly and with respect.

Chandra-Mouli et. al (2017) claims that:

Both the GEAS formative research and Kaagesten's review article show that young adolescents are still largely influenced by their parents. They look to their parents for basic needs, for information and advice, and for love and affection. They observe what their parents say and do and, consciously or otherwise, model themselves after their parents (as cited in Chandra-Mouli et. al, 2017, para. 8).

Because of this, it is safe to say that the way a parent raises their kid has a big impact on how they behave and the beliefs they have. Since parents are starting to defer their kids from the societal norms that teach them to act/think a certain way, kids are growing up with less prejudicial views that separate themselves from others, and instead becoming more accepting of everyone. This leads to less people believing sexist stereotypes, such as the one that all women are crazy/hysterical. This is ultimately why parents raising their kids differently is going to help diminish this stereotype over the course of the next few decades.

Conclusion

As it has been previously discussed, the stereotype that women are crazy or hysterical has been prevalent in society for many years, going all the way back to ancient times. This misinterpretation continues to be used on a daily basis in modern times, whether it be in the media or day-to-day conversation. Our experiment contained additional proof that this stereotype is still used today. Unfortunately, this sexist ideology has led to the mistreatment of women all over the world, emotionally and physically. It not only causes females to feel degraded and offended, but it

also can have negative impacts in their jobs, relationships, and social life. However, as social trends change, women have started using their voices and actions to protest this treatment, ultimately putting a halt to what our society considers “normal”. With this in mind, it is likely that modern sexist norms will diminish in the future, leading to a society that flourishes with acceptance and the fair treatment of women.

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