Reflection Paper 3: Gender Jail

Angel Ruzicka

Indiana University

CMCL-C450 Gender and Communication

Professor Shoop

April 19, 2022

Reflection Paper 3: Gender Jail

While this course has undoubtedly advanced my knowledge of what gender is and the way it affects communication, it has equivocally led to self-realizations clouded by the ominous feeling of gender dysphoria and oppression. While meeting the course outcomes, it has also led to a great deal of turmoil and confusion in my personal life as well. As a newly-out transgender woman, this class naturally can stir up feelings for which I was not as prepared as I had planned. My family, schools, media, and society's perceptions all have a large impact on me and how I feel. Not only have I demonstrated knowledge about key concepts and theories about gender, sex, and communication to develop informed opinions, but I have lived this every day of my life. I am sensitive towards the beliefs and values of others, even if they refuse to be sensitive towards mine. Lastly, I have gained ample experience in thinking about the moral and ethical problems regarding all these outside experiences, not only touching on my own experiences but incorporating others' beliefs as well. While I would never choose to be somebody else, this class has aided in my realization that, to my dismay, these invisible walls around me have me shackled in gender jail.

As a child and teenager, I related to male deficit model and alternate path model. I didn't fit in with most males because of how emotional and intimate I was. The male deficit model and alternate path models both iterate how the way we socialize and act is due to our gendered differences. With the alternate path model, it expresses that males show their intimacy in different ways, while the male deficit model mainly talks about the lack of intimacy in comparison to their female counterparts. I think the alternate path model is most definitely more valuable because it shows that males do have intimacy, which being in the military has shown me. There is quite a bit of camaraderie between male companions, but the way they show it to

each other is just much different than I'm used to seeing. However, being in the military has opened my eyes a lot and shown me that just because people don't show intimacy and friendship in the same ways does not mean that we aren't compatible. I've learned to be able to adjust and be more open-minded. I now have more male friends as I've grown up and learned that we are different but can still be close.

Regarding family, both of my parents were raised in smalltown, conservative America and were never exposed to LGBTQ+ members. While my coming out has severed my relationship with my mom, my dad is trying his best to accept me and told me that he would always love me. It is interesting how schools are handling this because as a substitute teacher, I must worry about being truthful about my transgender identity due to laws like the "Don't Say Gay" bill. Society has a long way to go before fully accepting people who do not fit into traditional gender binary roles, but that does not mean I will stop raising awareness and fighting for my siblings in this community. Our "society has created expectations regarding how males and females should look, behave, and feel. But these expectations are just as arbitrary as views of masculinity and femininity" (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019, p. 68). I defy these roles, and while it may take awhile for people to accept it, I will be here to educate people along the way about those not fitting into the gender binary construct.

One thing that I had never heard of before from Chapter 7 was permeable and firm ego boundaries. Once I read about it, though, the information made a lot of sense. I think that it is super important to be conscious of these ego boundaries. Personally, I had never been conscious of these since I did not know about them. Now, though, I've realized that this could be crucial to understanding people and how they act. I think that my challenge from this class is to be vigilant and understanding of people's different ego boundaries and be more understanding if someone is

not as empathetic if they have firmer ego boundaries, like my father. These concepts of boundaries play into the concepts and theories within the intersectionality of gender, sex, and communication.

I asked my friend Annie how they felt about gender. She feels as though that gender expression is completely up to the person at hand. If they want to be a man, they can; if they want to be a woman, they can. I would say that this falls under performative theory because Annie feels that people can express themselves however they please. Gender is fluid, not a rigid ideal. I think this is so important to recognize because I feel the same way. As a transgender woman, gender is a performative to me because I identify in a way that differs from my biological sex and interpret gender in a different way through my actions. A lot of people are not accepting of this, but I am lucky to have some people that care about how I feel and accept me. The textbook illustrates that people "express, or perform, conventional gender through everyday practices such as dominating or deferring in conversations and crossing our legs" (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019, p. 50). I relate to this because crossing my legs would not be typical of my biological sex, but I do this often as someone who identifies as female. I feel as though my gender is a performative daily because I get to pick how I identify, and my feelings are valid. Performative theory is something I had not previously heard of before this class, but I am glad that I learned about it because it helps my gender dysphoria and shows me it is okay to be who I am.

I mostly communicate in a feminine style of communication. I am often pretty lax and let the other person lead the conversation. I get a little bit of social anxiety talking to new people, so I prefer to let the other person take charge in conversational contexts. I feel like women are expected to not talk out of turn, not be too dominant within conversations, and be calm and

empathetic to the other person. I feel like I fill out these characteristics of feminine style of communication, but sometimes in group projects and such, I take the lead and have a more dominant, masculine style of communication. I think that to most people I violate my typical gender prescription because I was born a male, so for some people, I am constantly violating these gender constructs. Otherwise, it is only typically in events like group projects and such. When people who do not accept my trans identity, they try to force me into masculinized ways of talking and communicating. I often get negative looks and hate comments from people who are not accepting of the LGBTQ+ community. One thing I learned from the book is that "language defines gender as binary" (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019, p. 97). As someone who has struggled with their gender identity, I had not really thought of things in the way that this section has framed it. Everything seems to be gendered, as even our hurricanes have gendered names within society. The fact that sexism exists even within our hurricane naming system and how people react was so eye-opening and showed me how far we are away from true equality in America.

Overall, I have learned quite a bit of how gender and communication intersect and affect each other. As I have learned a lot just from living as who I am, this class gave me a lot of background on the theories and concepts behind gendered communication. I have learned to accept other's ideologies and have meaningful conversations, even if I don't necessarily agree with everything they have to say. My experiences through family, school, media, and society have influenced my understanding of people's perceptions regarding gender and communication. Being a transgender woman in 2022 has taught me a lot, along with this class. While the world has a long way to go, I am proud of the changes we have made and will continue to push for changes in the transfeminism movement. I won't stop until these gendered shackles of stereotypes are broken and release me from this gender jail I am trapped in.

References

Fixmer-Oraiz, N., & Wood, J. T. (2019). Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture (13th ed.). Cengage Learning.