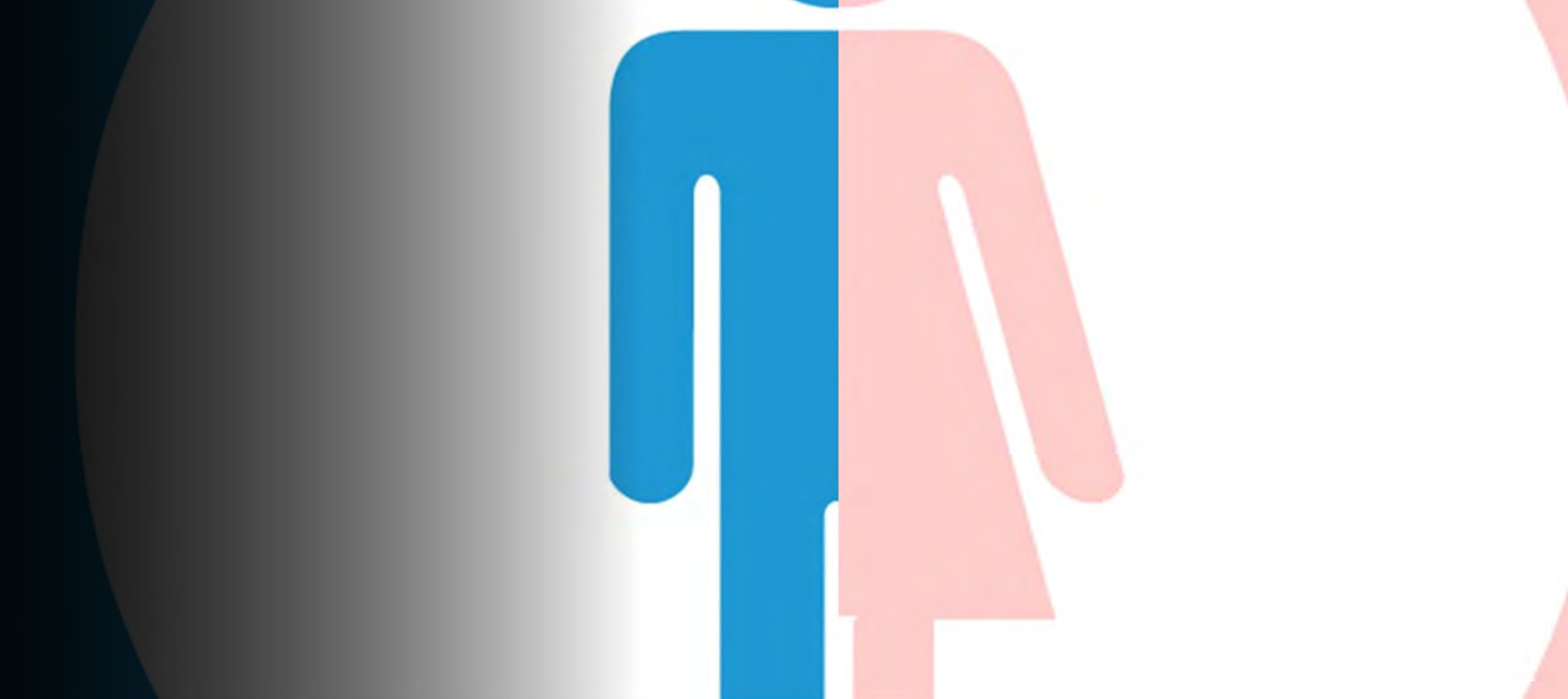


Heteronormative Encouragement and Favoring Gender Roles within School Systems in the Twenty-First Century



Chloe Gasper | Dr. Ryan Button | Tyler Junior College

Abstract

This research observes the extent of heteronormative encouragement/implication of gender roles in the intermediate school environment. I predict that, through the material studied (books, plays, etc.), gender roles are still being implemented and encouraged, as well as the heteronormative lifestyle.

Background/History

- Heteronormativity in the middle school population is largely under-researched and overlooked.
- Ironic due to the fact that the most change (physically) is occurring during the time period of 6th grade to 8th grade.
- This can be seen internationally, as adolescence is a troubling, challenging time for all individuals. The sources used for this research look at heteronormativity according to age, culture, and norms that are seen in different environments.



Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is based on George Herbert Mead (1863 – 1931) and taking the role of the other. He theorized that individuals find out what type of persona they should take on as they learned about societal expectations. This occurs in several stages – imitation stage, play stage, and the game stage.

- In the imitation stage, they begin to realize the differences between their actions and others, as well as becoming conscious of their decisions.
- In the play stage, they begin to take the role of other people, playing pretend, etc. It plays a crucial role in confirming gender roles.
- In the game stage, children begin to realize that there are expectations from other people, even people they may not know – which accentuates the anonymous constraints from the outside world. (Eitzen, 2017)

Methods

- Interview

I interviewed a total of 2 teachers at a middle school in East Texas. One of these teachers was a Language Arts teacher, the other was a Choir/Theatre teacher.

- Content Analysis

Focusing on the history of society and their response to non-heteronormative lifestyles, I had to compare my experience in middle school to the perspectives of the teachers interviewed.

- Ethnographic Research

Walking through the school, I could see the differences in camaraderie, seldom seeing anyone walking alone or without talking to others. There was more than one “No Bullying” poster, in places obviously seen by the student body.



Observations

- A girl with a more masculine persona – less makeup, hair cut short, in a group of guys
- Lots of separate, particular groups of students walking to and from class
- “No hate” poster
- More women teachers with boy-cut hairstyle
- More groups that included both boys and girls equally
- Speaking two different languages between groups (some Spanish, some English)
- More feminine décor around the school

Results

- The curricula does encourage a heteronormative lifestyle, however, it is slowly working its way out of the school system and becoming more of a neutral environment.
- There are more masculine girls than feminine men
- There is little to no bullying due to gender or sexuality.
- The assignments still include expected gender roles with the characters.



Implications for Future Research

Society can be more tolerable of different sexualities and different lifestyles, which can lower suicide and depression rates, along with mental health illness within the LGBT community. In terms of the body of knowledge, the information that is accumulated from this particular study will help create a more well-rounded perspective of the issues revolving around the set societal expectations. The information could be used to improve the policy of the education system, and aid it in becoming a more inclusive environment.

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