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Media, Culture, Identity

Dr. Tilton

1. Why did you select this topic?

  I chose to focus my videographic essay on Beyoncé's music video for her song "If I Were A Boy" because I wanted to analyze the visuals that she creates to accompany the intensity of her lyrics. I think that she is creative in interpreting the concrete gender roles that men and women have in society, as she exposes the flaws within them. Beyoncé is an influential figure in our society and I was especially interested in focusing on this music video because of the large number of views it has. I am sure that many of my classmates had seen the video prior to my project and I wanted to incorporate other media to emphasize her message about the general beliefs held towards women.

  I additionally wanted to choose a topic that dealt with gender roles, as I looked into course readings that express how men have always had an easier time getting what they want. Our class reading of chapter six, titled 'Social Inequality and Media Representation,' discusses how infrequently women are seen on television compared to men (Croteau). Men are more likely to play lead roles than women and women are rarely seen as the directors of movies. Sports channels also spend significantly more time on the coverage of men's sports in comparison to women's sports. These inequalities seen in media influenced me to choose my topic. Additionally, I was motivated to focus on gender roles after reading about the concept of men having to project strong levels of masculinity when playing characters in military/war films. This is seen in chapter five of the same reading. Women are not the only ones who are expected to act a certain way. This chapter reveals how men have to come off as the tough guy and put on a brave face in hard times (Croteau). Although my piece focuses on the expectations of women, I thought that it was important to briefly look at the stereotypes associated with men as well.

2. What is the argument of your piece?

My piece is arguing that there are certain expectations held in place for women and that these expectations are unjust. The clip that I use from That 70s Show particularly highlights my argument, as the mom says, "women have to pretend to be weak and fragile so that men can feel superior" (Brazill). Women are supposed to act in a way that heightens the sense of security that men feel in their relationship, which is seen in the scene where Beyoncé's boyfriend confronts her about her flirting (Beyoncé). Through Beyoncé's role reversal, my piece also shows how different of a life men and women truly live. It is clear that men have the upper hand in almost all circumstances and Beyoncé attempts to show this.

3. What are the three keywords that you chose to apply and why? Did you consider other keywords? If so, why did you choose the ones that you did?

The three keywords that I applied are power, representation, and stereotype. In choosing these keywords, I went through my studyguide for the midterm and reread the definitions and examples that I had put to ensure that I was choosing the most fitting keywords. Beyoncé's music video shows the power that men have over women, the gender stereotype surrounding women, and the way that women are typically represented in society (Beyoncé).

I considered using the keyword 'ideology' to analyze the beliefs centered around the gender roles that are present in our society. I did decide to reference 'The White of Their Eyes' in assessing Beyoncé's 'If I Were A Boy' because it includes supporting examples of the roles that men and women are intended to fulfill (Dines). The source includes an example that explains how girls are made up of 'sugar and spice and everything nice' while boys act more aggressively toward one another.

4. How and why did you make decisions for the pieces of media that you used?

I decided to compare 'If I Were A Boy' to clips from sitcoms because I felt like the content successfully supported my argument. I am pretty familiar with both Friends and That 70s show, which made it easier to recall examples of what I was looking for. I also found it interesting to compare the gender roles seen in television shows that first aired in the 90s with the gender roles that existed in 2009, which was the year that 'If I Were A Boy' was released (Beyoncé). Although the gap in time is relatively small, no real improvements are seen surrounding the treatment of women in media. Beyoncé is singing about a topic that is relevant to the content seen in these television shows. Another television show where we see the presence of stereotypes is Masters of None (Ansari). Dev and his friend are actors who both audition for the role of a stereotypical Indian man. The modern television show asks the men to attempt their best impression of a cab driver who has a thick Indian accent.

The audio that I included in the end of my piece is from a super bowl commercial, which was a suggestion from a classmate. I liked the idea of presenting my argument from a different angle, as I showed how not all people see women as inferior to men. Before playing the audio, I posed a question to the viewers, asking them to imagine how our world would look if we all shared the same perspective as little girls. One girl in particular believes that she is capable of doing everything that a boy can do, which is both true and promising for the future.

5. How did the process of making your video shape how you understand media, culture, and identity?

In making my video, I found that the media plays a large role in shaping the identities of the viewers. Those who watch television shows like Friends and That 70s Show are made to believe that they are seeing an accurate representation of how women should be treated, which can be especially harmful for viewers who are of a younger age. These shows still air on television today and it makes me question whether they should be censored from children. 'This Film Is Not Yet Rated' demonstrates how careful

parents are in choosing the content that they allow their children to see (Becky). I initially believed that

the MPAA was harsh in grading movies, but after taking a closer look at what seems like harmless

entertainment, there are clear signs of dated ideologies that could pose as a threat to progress in future

generations. In my rough cut, I had included examples from movies and television shows where gender

roles are reversed and characters are dressed as the opposite sex. It was not difficult to think of content

from my childhood that included these reversal scenes. This made me think about how I was introduced

to these concepts at such a young age. Furthermore, in my piece I replaced the visual component of the

#likeagirl commercial with a black screen (Always). This adjustment invites the viewer to form their

own interpretation of the audio. By imagining how they believe a girl would run, fight, and jump, the

audience is forced to confront whether their views align with those of the little girl or whether they really

think that girls underperform boys.

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