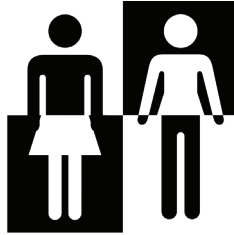


Chapter 12



ANTI-STEREOTYPING



What's the Trend?

Across media and culture, traditional gender roles are being reversed, assumptions about alternative lifestyles are challenged, and perceptions of what makes someone belong to a particular gender, ethnicity, or category are being fundamentally changed.

Karl Stefanovic is an Australian TV personality who spends his mornings on air as co-host of the Aussie morning news show *Today*. In 2015, he achieved global notoriety after confessing to a secret experiment he had conducted over the past year in an attempt to shine a spotlight on a bias most women take for granted: heightened expectations for their fashion choices and physical appearance in contrast to the lower expectations for their male counterparts.

After seeing the constant criticism his co-host Lisa Wilkinson faced about her clothing and appearance, Stefanovic decided to do something to visualize it. For a year, he wore the same suit on air with a few small variations just to see if anyone would notice. No one did.

As the story about his experiment came out, most people saw it as further proof that women in media and entertainment are judged by

different criteria. The fact that this double standard exists is not all that surprising. What is more interesting is just how common it has become for men like Stefanovic to decide to shine light on this kind of unfairness.

For years, gender-based battles for equality were seen as “women’s issues,” causes tailor made for women to band together to fight against the men holding them down. Gender and other equality issues are no longer considered one-sided. In the coming year, as these complex problems continue to evolve beyond stereotypes, forward thinkers will join together against backward thinkers, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or other categories. The widespread rejection of categorizing entire groups based on assumptions is the shift at the heart of *Anti-Stereotyping*, and it is changing everything from how we see men versus women, and the lines dividing them as well.

While I first described this trend two years ago, the time since then has brought plenty more stories of how women and men are shifting traditional roles, how genders are becoming less rigid, and the idea of looking at gender as a distinctive identifier or divider of capability is fading as well.

Masculinity Makeover

Many years ago, the idea of men steadily embracing their softer sides was unfavorably described as “metrosexual” behavior. The term was popularized in the nineties as a way to describe men who cared about their physical appearance, got manicures regularly, and carried around “man-bags” instead of wallets. A generation later, the new stereotypical description for men is to call them “lumbersexuals” –a term describing the growing number of men returning to long-standing masculine choices, like wearing flannel shirts and growing unkempt beards.

Yet both of these descriptors focus on short-lived fashion trends, or minutia such as how long the average man’s beard happens to be at a particular time. The more interesting evolution of masculinity over time has been how the familial qualities of being a nurturing caregiver, enjoying time with children, and loving being a parent have shifted to renewed importance. The new face of masculinity has little to do with what material your shirts are made of or when you last shaved.

Instead, a new generation of dads is abandoning old stereotypes of fathers working long hours to support the household in lieu of spending time with kids and family. Some quit day jobs to become entrepreneurs, while others start or choose to work at organizations willing to offer equal time off to men for everything from paternity leave to attending more kid's activities.

A greater number of companies such as Virgin, Microsoft, Johnson & Johnson, and others offer generous parental leave for dads as well as moms—a practice common in many European countries (especially Scandinavia) but uncommon in other regions. Profiling an expansion in the types of people choosing to become parents in the first place, *Pacific Standard* magazine recently profiled a growing trend among single, straight men using fertility clinics and gestational carriers to finally have children and become caregivers, without requiring a female partner.

Longtime doll maker Mattel also made waves in 2015 by featuring a boy in its TV spot for the Moschino Barbie doll, responding to years of criticism about its role in perpetuating gender stereotypes. In the original description of this trend, another example of this shift was a petition from a 13-year-old girl which led toy maker Hasbro to create a gender-neutral version of its iconic Easy-Bake Oven for girls and boys.

This shift towards a kinder and more well-rounded portrait of men has also been reflected directly in imagery through leading stock-photo provider Getty Images. In 2015, the brand launched a popular new curated collection of images of men as part of its popular “Lean In Together”, which showed men doing formerly unexpected things like changing diapers. (In fact, global searches for the phrase “dad changing diaper” increased sevenfold from 2007 to 2015.)

Why is this imagery so important? As Getty Images director of visual trends Pam Grossman shares, “we believe the more images that a person ingests which are gender-forward and which break gender stereotypes and clichés, the more normalized that becomes. Not only does that help make them much more comfortable with images of women leading or men caretaking, but they are much more comfortable with adopting that kind of behavior in their actual lives and aspiring to that behavior.”

Clearly, the imagery shift is also reflecting what advertisers and others seeking stock imagery are searching for as well. In 2007, for example, the top-selling fatherhood image was a relatively typical scene of a dad playing football with his son. In 2015, the top image was a dad reading to his daughter.

Fierce Femininity

The biggest box-office opening of any film in Hollywood history officially belongs to *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, which premiered in December 2015 and amassed more than \$1 billion in just its first 12 days—the fastest film to the \$1 billion mark ever.

The original *Star Wars Trilogy*, as most people will remember, featured the far-from-helpless Princess Leia as a central character. She had a quiet strength and was a hero to an entire generation of women. Aside from being the latest installment in one of the best-loved science-fiction franchises of all times, this new addition to the Star Wars film franchise also reimagines gender roles for a new generation, featuring two new young stars, Rey (played by Daisy Ridley) and Finn (played by John Boyega).

In the film, the young Finn is routinely saved by his female co-star Rey—a story model that has been repeated through some of the most popular action films of the past two years, including *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and many others.

This flip of gender roles has become common in television as well. *Bella and the Bulldogs*, for example, is a Nickelodeon teen show featuring a central character who is quarterback for the middle-school football team (and just happens to also be female). *Quantico* is a terrorist-story thriller starring Priyanka Chopra—an actress best known for her roles as a dancing diva in Bollywood films—as a fierce FBI agent on the run.

This changing model of strong female characters as role models is happening outside the world of entertainment as well. In the business world, there are a growing number of top female executives at some of the largest companies in the world, including top executives at Facebook, Pepsi, GM, Xerox, Oracle, HP, Mondelez International, and Lockheed Martin.

Former child star Danica McKellar (*The Wonder Years*) is now the bestselling author of a series of books all about geometry and algebra designed to get girls interested and excited in math, a longtime passion for McKellar who also describes herself as a lifelong “math nerd.”

In the world of sports, two professional hockey leagues for women in the United States and Canada are both growing. Even the NFL, long dominated by men, saw its first female coach in 2015 when the Arizona Cardinals hired Jen Welter as a training camp and preseason intern.

In sports, business, media, and entertainment combined, the past year brought plenty of examples of the continuing shift in gender roles and stereotypes. We are moving toward a new model for how women are being appreciated as more than side characters, and judged on more than traditionally feminine qualities.

Gender Blend

In late 2015 Wesley Morris, critic-at-large covering all things cultural for The New York Times, wrote a recap of the year titled “The Year We Obsessed Over Identity.” The article explored our shifting cultural understanding of gender and just how confused and blended it has become. He wrote “gender roles are merging. Races are being shed ... we’ve been made to see how trans and bi and poly-ambi-omni we are.”

This same merging was at the heart of what Getty Images declared as one of the prevailing trends of the past year in imagery, the growing “gender blend” where identities are being reimagined. This blend was partially explained and showcased in their “Lean In Together” collection, referenced earlier in this chapter, and also through the imagery sought out and used by a growing number of advertisers, which makes gender a more neutral quality.

Billboards in Toronto, for example, from fashion retailer Desigual showed two models of non-specific gender in an embrace right above the words “gender neutral.” This focus of the neutrality of gender is also at the heart of a multi-year shift among toy stores around the world to reimagine the concept of having separate boys’ and girls’ sections and

instead simply showcasing products by category and letting kids choose based on their passions rather than their gender.

As we move into the coming year, this blending of gender identities will continue to influence marketing, media, retail store design, and many other unexpected categories.

Why It Matters

For years the idea of gender was at the heart of how we saw ourselves and our identities. In 2016, this focus on gender will transform into more content and experiences being driven by passion and personality. People will be encouraged to like what they like and find others who like it as well. The younger generation of boys and girls are already seeing dominant and collaborative role models who reflect any identity they relate to.

Ultimately, this balancing of genders will lead to a new view of typically stereotypical assumptions of others. We will personally see more exceptions to the “rules” and have more firsthand experiences of those situations where stereotypes are proven untrue by the existence of their opposites. The result of this change will be more people willing to take risks outside of traditional roles and the expectation that the experiences they are offered reflect that same desire for something new and unexpected.

Who Should Use This Trend?

This trend will be particularly useful if you happen to be in an industry that has typically been dominated by one type of person or one gender. Harley-Davidson motorcycles, for example, has seen tremendous growth over the past several years thanks in part to its ability to successfully reimagine its target audience from predominantly male to now a more even mix of men and women. The brand has made the shift so deeply that it is now routinely used as an example of how to promote an unexpected brand to women and succeed. The lesson from their example is clear: Your audience may be broader than you think—and in a world where people are rediscovering what role identity plays in the experiences they

love, you have an ability to open your business to new audiences and drive new revenue as well.

How To Use This Trend

- ✓ **Search for Accidental Stereotyping** – The biggest theme from this trend is that there are plenty of ways that we put gender bias into the messages that we share without even thinking about them. Do you always refer to CEOs as “he,” nurses as “she,” or use dated imagery on your website? These may seem like small things, but a growing number of customers and business professionals alike are paying attention to these subtle cues and may actually be influenced by them more than you think. As a result, finding and removing these biases will be critical.
- ✓ **Appreciate Dads!** – As a dad who once worked in a full-time role before starting his own company, I remember how tough it could be to find time to meet work demands and commitments to my family. Some businesses make it easier than others, but there are more and more that create a double standard by allowing more free time and flexible schedules for moms, and finding subtle ways to avoid or create a cultural bias against offering the same thing to dads. Don’t be one of those companies. Learn to appreciate and support new dads at least as much as you support new moms.