PSY 215 Module Six Activity Template

For this journal activity, you will focus on the influence of language on shaping perceptions of human behavior. Specifically, consider how the words we use can have a dramatic positive or negative influence on how we view the biological, psychological, and social orientations of others. Respond to the following prompts with a minimum of 3 to 5 sentences. Address the rubric criteria listed below and support your answers with a credible source when necessary. Complete this template by replacing the bracketed text with the relevant information.

- Describe how the words we use to discuss gender and sexuality shape our **perception** of what is considered normal or abnormal. Provide an example within your response.

    Society has labeled gender and sexuality in the same way throughout history, which has shaped our perception of what is considered normal or abnormal. Considering people believed that gender and sexuality are the same, they found that someone who identifies as a different gender than their sex is abnormal. Society also created numerous stereotypes of both men and women that influences our perception of what is normal or abnormal. Men have to be strong, non-emotional, and aggressive, whereas women have to be submissive, emotional, and gentle. We learn the stereotypes of gender and sexuality at a young age. For example, in elementary school, teachers ask students to raise their hand if they want to help put away chairs, but only call on the male students to help (suggesting that the girls are not strong enough to carry chairs). The words society uses to describe men and women have led to people conforming themselves to those two genders in order to fit in with society. Society's negative word choice to describe other genders (transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, etc.) have shaped our perception to think that anyone that does not identify as male or female to be abnormal. The media (news, televisions shows, movies, music, etc.) has also influenced our perception of gender and sexuality. Women are usually depicted as the "helpers" in media. They are the ones helping cook and clean. For example, many children's television shows "… often transmit stereotypes about gender roles such as 'math is for boys and not for girls'" (Wille, Gaspard, Trautwein, et al., 2018, para. 1). However, times are now changing, and people are beginning to form organizations to advocate for normalization of people's choice to identify as a different gender despite what their sexual orientation is. Media has also incorporated people of different genders into their work, giving people new perceptions of gender and sexuality.

    The words we use to describe occupations can also shape our perceptions of gender and sexuality being normal or abnormal. "… a job title that has a gender mark on it, like an *e-s-s* ending or an *m-a-n* ending, and you ask them to draw pictures or talk about who's doing that job, they will pick the one that matches the gender of the word…" (Snyder, 2015, para. 12). For example, doctors, policemen, firefighters are usually thought to be men and nurses, maids, teachers, and waitress are usually viewed as jobs for females. In order to change our perceptions of genders and sexualities in occupations, we should use more gender neutral terminology. For example, "… replacing 'fireman' with 'firefighter' or stewardess with 'flight attendant'" (Snyder, 2015, para. 14). Gendered words themselves (e.g. "rifleman", "fireman", "actress/actor", "steward/stewardess") don't have any inherent negative meaning, they just are products of languages and grammar developing. The issue lies when these words start to negatively shape our perceptions and when they are used to label and devalue others.

- Imagine engaging in conversation with family, friends, or colleagues and eventually realizing that they were inadvertently promoting stereotypes about gender or sexuality. Describe the **thoughts and feelings** that you might experience during such a conversation.

     In this hypothetical situation, I would feel uncomfortable and somewhat ashamed. I would understand that they are my family or friends, and that I should care for them. Perhaps they do not mean what they say with malice or hate, or simply as "just a joke". Despite this, it is still wrong for them to be saying such things. Furthermore, I might feel some anger as these stereotypes and views they speak of might have shaped their own lives and upbringing in a negative way, or possibly even my own. I might even have feelings of hopelessness, as it may not be possible for me to confront or correct their views. If the individuals promoting stereotypes were somewhat removed from me, like co-workers or friends I am not particularly close with, I could possibly correct them or try to change their views, without the fear of stigma. With family however, especially in my culture, correcting family and relatives "older" and "above" your position is frowned upon and taboo. This would, ultimately, lead me to the situation of simply chalking it up as "oh, they're old, they don't mean it like that, that's just how they are…". The dilemma arises then, if I cannot correct my family and nobody chooses to correct each other, when does it stop and who is able to break the cycle? This dilemma is something I myself face today and is something my current generation faces and will continue to face.

- Describe the language used within your own **culture** (e.g., family members, friends, colleagues) when discussing gender and sexuality.

     The Russian government is against people changing their gender identity, as shown by the laws that say a person cannot change their gender identity until undergoing surgery to align their sexual organs with their gender and that telling children gay people exist is illegal. However, the citizens of Russia believe that people are free to be who they want to be as long as it doesn't interfere with the lives of another fellow Russian. For example, in my hometown in Russia, people accepted gay people as long as they did not push their beliefs onto others. This caused me to be accepting of others for who they are and not placing limitations or judgements onto a person solely based on their gender identity. Unfortunately, after being adopted by an American family, I experienced living with people who do solely judge people based on their gender identity. My family members are against people exploring and changing their gender identity. They believe that gender and sex are the same terms, however, this is untrue. My family made gender identity a political issue and supported laws that went against people changing their identity, instead of giving people the freedom to choose who they want to be. I strongly disagree with my family's statements because people have the right to do what they want to with their body and mind, removing people's freedom to choose is unethical.

References:

Snyder, D. (2015, January 28). *Sexist Job Titles and the Influence of Language on Gender Stereotypes -: College of Humanities*. College of Humanities. https://humanities.byu.edu/sexist-job-titles-and-the-influence-of-language-on-gender-stereotypes/.

Wille, E., Gaspard, H., Trautwein, U., Oschatz, K., Scheiter, K., & Nagengast, B. (2018, November 19). *Gender Stereotypes in a Children's Television Program: Effects on Girls' and Boys' Stereotype Endorsement, Math Performance, Motivational Dispositions, and Attitudes*. Frontiers. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02435/full.