

## July Op-Ed



### ***Do memes and internet culture perpetuate gender stereotypes?***

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It is likely that in your pocket, lies a limitless realm of information, media, and social communications known as the internet. The internet is as vast and unknown as the deep blue ocean, with many areas still unseen by many people. However, I can almost guarantee that everyone reading this will have used the internet at least once today, with young people using it more often than anyone. From a young boy's perspective, the internet is a place you can escape to and are free to do whatever you want; but it is this exact freedom that can bring about many negative impacts. Being a young boy myself, I can speak on this issue truthfully and will focus on my experience with how gender is depicted in various places on the internet.

One thing that most young boys are involved with on the internet is known as 'meme culture. A meme is an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations (credit: Oxford dictionary). The most popular platform which circulates memes is known as Reddit. There are many variations of memes, but the most popular ones are edgier and often make light of a serious matter. In terms of gender stereotypes, I have seen many "boys vs girls" memes on the platform which often paint girls as being generic/square whilst boys being outlandish/funny. An example can be seen below.

Teacher: Alright class, today were going to do camping in the woods.

Girls: Ehh!? This sucks! No internet! I can't update my instagram here.

Boys:



(credit to Reddit user u/HappyPlacebo)

Of course, most mature boys and girls will see this as some harmless fun and it may be a funny way to express the differences between boys and girls. Also, these memes show the extremes of the two genders, mainly just for laughs and with no spite towards the opposite gender. However, the argument could be made that these memes set unrealistic standards for how boys and girls act. Especially with the younger and impressionable audience on Reddit, these memes may influence them to see girls or boys through the lens of a certain stereotype. Using the meme above as an example, a young girl could see this and think boys are wild and gung-ho, whilst a young boy could see it and think girls can't survive a day without social media. These stereotypes aren't exactly harmful in any way, but for young kids, this may lead to unrealistic perceptions of the opposite gender as they grow older.

It is important to note that whilst Reddit is the primary platform for posting memes, it is not the only place they can be found. These memes are all-pervasive and a simple search for any meme (e.g boys vs girls memes) will yield thousands of results.

So although most Reddit users may be mature enough to not take some sexist memes to heart, younger children who can easily view these memes through google might internalise some of the gender stereotypes present in the memes.



All this is not to say that these memes should be banned from circulating. Most of Reddit's user base is mature enough to not take these memes too seriously and young kids honestly shouldn't even be on the platform, to begin with. I do think, however, that parents of young kids should monitor the content they view online and make sure they aren't learning any bad lessons. There are many more vile and offensive things on the internet, even mainstream social media sites like Instagram can make teens feel insecure and not feminine/macho enough. To conclude, much like the ocean, the internet is a vast and unknown place, and parents have to act as a navigator for their kids so they (hopefully) learn the good values and dismiss the bad ones.