# Chapter 20
# The Coming Gendered Interrelations of Power, Journalism, and the Media

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the past, present, and future of gender identity and outlines continued challenges in the future. It specifically looks at how journalism and media more generally propagate gender stereotypes in the news. Journalists do not necessarily help to clarify issues sufficiently to educate society, perhaps due to their own biases and misunderstandings. This chapter investigates how media coverage in the past has not been consistently positive in covering issues related to gender when the people involved function outside traditional roles. The author suggests this is not likely to change in the near to distant future.*

## IMAGINE . . .

*Lou and Kella were intrigued by the future, hoping for a better world in which they could express themselves fully as they felt they were born to be without being locked into artificial gender assignments. It was 2040, yet both still pushed back on the boundaries of what their parents, friends and the world set for them, often even unintentionally. Gender assignment was simply another way for society to categorize and codify humans in an increasingly data driven society. Marketers like politicians simply sought convenient ways to label individuals so as to target them more effectively for their needs, not for those of the individual. Even scientists, although research has shown otherwise, were still divided on gendered roles as biologically or socially assigned.*

*As the world continued to overpopulate, the tolerance for deviance diminished, and governments at the local and national level were more interested in maintaining and controlling the larger social order than providing individual choice or preference. Robots, although without gender, were admired in this new world, and through the years also fashioned to emulate those of traditional sex roles. Female appearing*

*robots were more likely to function in domestic or secretarial roles. Male appearing robots functioned in security and executive roles. A number of groups advocated against gendered assignments for machines, and consequently more and more robots and machines were made to accommodate those grievances. However, the bulk of the world still fell captive to traditional notions of gender, and machines or individual outliers were not accepted equally by most. Utopian science fiction continued to show a better way, a more enlightened path. Lou and Kella, avid sci-fi lit buffs, longed for a future that would forward better options. They imagined the future as a more creative space that allowed for individuality. How many years would they need to wait for such a world? They mused, "What about those utopian tales written by science fiction authors—are those not possibilities for creating a utopian world for many currently left out?" The problem was that such scenarios were far in the future, much further than the 22$^{nd}$ century, or so it would appear.*

## Gender Bias in Science and Society

Today, most would agree that *Star Trek* (1966) was one of the first popular television series that toyed with concepts of gender fluidity, but those break-through moments were often short-lived. There have been science fiction authors who reimagined a non-gendered world. What will gender fluidity mean in the future? How might biology and technology continue to evolve so that gender is not merely a parental choice, but a continual choice throughout one's life? This case presents the world of which Ella and Lou contemplate, while stuck in a world driven by un-compassionate science, for being able to do something doesn't always mean that it will happen.

The question of gender has become the subject of scientific research in the last several years. Gender identity is a loose concept that intersects biological, psychological and sociocultural factors. It is often one's sense of self that prevails in determining how one identifies one's own gender (Tacikowski, Fust, & Ehrsson, 2020). Perhaps no one has considered the possibilities and implications of non-gendered society than science fiction writers who toy with arbitrary societal rules. Most notably *Star Wars* (1977) has explored the diversity inherent in the universe, particularly appreciating the uniqueness among beings.

Authors like Ursula K. Le Guin, being one of the first to employ characters who defy stereotypes, challenged gender roles in the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). Another author who has challenged such roles is Octavia Butler in her Afrofuturist Xenogenesis series which featured a three-gendered world. For a thorough reading of how science fiction has rewritten gender roles, Brian Attebery's (2002) *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* is highly recommended. In *The Biopolitics of Gender and Science Fiction* (2021), *Emily Cox-Palmer-White (2021)* reviews feminist and gender theory as it relates to representations in popular science fiction media and literature. Current and future engendered perceptions will be influenced by, and critiqued by, popular science fiction (Berlatsky, 2017).

## Defining Gender

Understanding what we mean by "gender" is difficult because the word has been defined and redefined to mean various things at various times. In 2020, "gender fluidity" was added as new term to the latest edition of the *Oxford Dictionary*; it is described as the "state of being male or female as expressed through social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes associated with a particular sex or determined as a result of one's sex" (Charo, 2020). Alternative

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