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Dr. Guler

Journal Entry on ‘Terministic Screen’

The terministic screen, as developed by Kenneth Burke, is a definition of reality. Kelough, who writes about Burke and his concept of terministic screens defines it as language that influences human thought and “directs the attention of the audience along a certain line of thought” (Kelough, p.5). It is language that promotes a different line of thought and guides how humans think.

Burke believes that terministic screens do contribute to sexism because he classifies all language as a terministic screen, therefore sexist language would also operate as a screen. Wilma Scott Heide was one of the first women to deliver a public presentation on sexist language and sex role stereotypes. Historically, as Heide points out, sexist language was probably a reflection of the “subservient role women played” (Kelough, p.8). Although the role of women in society has changed drastically over the past few decades, the language is not reflecting the revolutions that women have made. This ‘sexist language’ is then taught and passed down to children who then grow up assuming the subservient role is correct, which continues the cycle of not having equal sex roles. Certain phrases that use words such as ‘man’, ‘girl’, ‘lady’, etc. produces images or perceptions of certain sexes demonstrating a specific act or characteristic. This is how the terministic screen operates with sexist language.