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The Consequences of Gender Roles

Expectations have changed drastically for women in the last century; they went from long skirts and etiquette school to bikinis, pants, and the freedom to speak out and act independently. With the sudden change, you'd think the situation is entirely equal for both men and women. It isn't. Gender roles still play a huge part in our society and in our entire world. A woman's role in society is still to be quiet, cook, clean, and enjoy passive, innocent hobbies. We're supposed to like puppies and kittens and be afraid of mice and snakes. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to enjoy muscle cars and watching football between being the main bread-winner of the house. Gender roles should be abolished because of the harm they do to women and men alike in a society that continually strives for equality yet never touches on the subject of gender roles. What men and women are supposed to be, what we are expected to be, doesn't just hurt the individual, it hurts the society and blinds them to issues that desperately need to be addressed.

I've spent a good part of my life thinking feminists were crazy women who would do anything to put men beneath them. Of course, the only people around me who would complain about them were men. When I discovered the term "gender role," which was explained to me as what society expected men and women to act as, I was intrigued to find that that was what sensible feminists were trying to do -- eliminate these expectations society has put on both genders and set everyone on an equal plane, not crush men beneath their high heels and demand

they cook dinner and wash the dishes. I was also shocked to find that men could be feminists, too. The list of all the kinds of people who cared about gender roles, feminism and their abolishment began to pile up: heterosexual people, homosexual people, transexual people, men, women. That was when I knew that I should care, too, and that it was something holding us all back.

One sickening result of the gender roles forced upon us by society is that a woman can be blamed for being raped. In a survey conducted on rape victims, over half of the women answering said that there were "situations when the rape victim is to blame" (Bindel). Also, it was found that "one in 10 respondents consider most claims of rape to be 'probably false'" (Bindel). One of the common situations is when a woman is said to be wearing clothes that are revealing. The reason this is a taboo for women and gets unnecessary blame put on their shoulders is because women are expected to be conservative, timid creatures. This not only hurts women who are victims of rape, but reinforces the expectation that men are perverse apes. We know that men aren't attracted to cleavage like sharks are drawn to blood, so why are they treated like it? It's because that's what they've been portrayed as by society.

A collective mass may cry, "Women aren't actually blamed for rape! Who ever told you that?" I don't know, how many times have you walked down a city street or been at a pool when you see a woman whose skirt is "too short" or their bikini top is "too revealing"? When women are raped, it is still asked, "What was she wearing?" Being ignorant to the problem helps no one, and I'm confident it's common knowledge that not all men are pigs.

Parents become stressed when their child wants to play with toys that don't fit into what they should be play with (for example, a boy who likes baby dolls), seeing it as unnatural. They

force their children to play with toys they don't want to play with, suppressing their true desires for toys that fit into what their gender should be playing with. Repression is "posited as being a mechanism to all mental disabilities" ("Repression"). This means that repression has a definite link to mental disorders. So, when you repress your child's wants and needs, you create the bridge from a healthy normal child to a child who may end up with any kind of mental disorder.

The collective mass then cries, "Children are too young to know what they want, their parents are just helping them see what they really want!" Actually, they really aren't too young. If a child can say that they prefer chocolate ice cream over vanilla, I'm pretty sure they can tell when they don't enjoy playing with Barbies or G.I. Joes. Yes, children need someone to look out for them and make decisions for them, that's why they need to be raised by adults who can. However, when you tell your little boy that he can't play with the Rapunzel doll or your little girl that she can't have an Iron Man action figure, all simply because they aren't marketed for your son or daughter's gender, you reinforce that any other person who doesn't fit into their gender role is unnatural and shouldn't act outside of it (Tedder). When they begin to understand what sets the genders apart, it's best to foster what they feel instead of forcing them to be something they're not (Tedder). This just supports inequality and the fear of our children turning out anything but heterosexual (Tedder).

Outstanding female roles in books are seen as something exceptional instead of a given. For example, Harry Potter's Hermione Granger was hailed as strong and motivational, ranked number two on a list of strong females ("Hermione Granger"). She's considered one of a kind. There should be far more powerful female characters with depth like Ms. Granger. Females, for the most part, are still depicted as weak and in need of protection.

The collective mass is hopefully using an inside voice by now, saying, "There's nothing wrong with being praised for writing a strong female character." That isn't the problem. The problem is that there aren't many other examples of strong female characters, and when they're written it's a big surprise because the character is female. How about a list of the typical "fragile flower" characters in our media? First we have *Twilight's* Bella Swan, who is loathed by a great number of individuals. *The Great Gatsby's* Daisy Buchanan was a woman viewed as fickle and indecisive when it came to love. *Fahrenheit 451's* Mildred Montag was a woman unwilling to fight the suppression everyone faced. Scooby Doo's Daphne was constantly kidnapped. Many others are prime examples of women depicted as being in need or in trouble almost constantly.

Society has projected the image of the perfect girl or the perfect boy and when one isn't a perfect girl or perfect boy others tease or see them as not being natural. Being anything but a heterosexual individual who identifies with their gender is viewed as unnatural, leading to those who feel that way to hide it, and when they do come out they are bullied for it. An article on Violence Prevention Works claims, "Seventy-eight percent of gay (or believed to be gay) teens are teased or bullied in their schools and communities" (Riese). A "manly" girl or a "girly" man gets the lashing words of their peers. Teens are also exposed to negative terms related to one's sexuality on an almost daily basis (Riese). Without gender roles, this bullying wouldn't happen. We all know the link between bullying and teen suicide, but what we don't know is that suicide is the third highest cause of death for teens ("Suicide Fact or Fiction?"). If this bullying were eliminated, the rate of death by suicide for teens would also hopefully go down.

The collective mass finally says, "But there are tons of tough girls in the media, it's not viewed as unnatural." Tough girls are a very good part of modern day media, I will give you

that. But the fact that it's given special attention is very similar to what I said about strong female characters. It should be an every day occurrence, these tough girls. The special attention proves that it is, in fact, still viewed as unnatural.

Gender roles are holding our society back in a way that isn't touched on often enough. This leaves us with a world full of angst for individuals who don't fit in their gender role and injustice to groups of all kinds. Females are still expected to be weak, and when a woman in literature is strong everyone gasps and slaps them with an award while it's not a big deal for a man. Then there's the fact that men are depicted as perverted monsters. Teens in the school system are constantly taught by their peers' taunts that to be anything but heterosexual is wrong. As a woman, plenty has changed for the better for me, but when my mother became stressed over how I didn't like my Barbie dolls, I know I am still in a society where people are expected to be caged in by expectations as to what they enjoy.

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