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Researched Argument

Stereotypes and Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a highly discussed issue in today's society. As feminism is quite prevalent throughout American culture, it is easy for one to say that modern society is in the right track to considering each gender as equal. However, gender stereotyping has prevented the general public from reaching true equality. Our society lacks the ability to accept each other as equal due to the constant strive for a sense of being different and better than the other, whether that be gender, race, age, religion, etc. In particular, gender stereotypes prevent gender equality throughout a human's lifespan by creating social, economic, and personal pressures among all ages.

From before the individual is born, stereotypes are being presumed about the soon-to-be newborn. A baby shower is held and everything is blue for a boy and pink for a girl. This automatically designates this baby to a stereotype that they must uphold based on their gender. Although it could be argued that some families are resistant to conform to this stereotypical behavior, the vast majority participates in this socially constructed norm. One of the major aspects of gender identity is how the individuals perceive themselves to be similar or different than peers of the same gender. This is based off of personal traits, interests and the appearance of the individual (Patterson, 2012). If a child notices that others of the same gender do not share these same qualities, they will feel as if they do not fit in with those around them. They then feel the need to conform to the stereotypes that have been formed to shape the ideal little boy or girl in order to get acceptance from their peers. Individuals who do not conform to these stereotypes are frowned upon and therefore treated unequally. Bullying creates a hostile environment for

these children, and therefore they try valiantly to live up to the standards their peers have set for them (Kimmel, 2013, p. 208). This is only the beginning of a life-long span of judgment placed upon those who do not confine to the stereotypes developed by our society.

As these individuals move from children to adolescents, the pressure to conform to gender stereotypes only increases. As an average of 92.6% of 11-20 year olds participate in social media, teenagers construct an image of themselves for the public to see. These teenagers carefully put together this image for their peers to judge and essentially achieve some sort of social power or respect (Tortajada, I. I., Araüna, N. N., & Martínez, I. J, 2013). Through social media, teenagers feel as if they hold some power over others if they present a favorable profile to the public. As stated in the article, Advertising Stereotypes and Gender Representation in Social Networking Sites, “What a teenager reveals about herself (or himself) can help her achieve greater social control; this is therefore a strategic act she performs in order to induce those socially desired results she is trying to obtain, to manage the impression she makes on other people, and to earn social approval.” (Tortajada, I. I., Araüna, N. N., & Martínez, I. J, 2013). This power entitles them to be able to take advantage of those who may not present a favorable profile and deem them socially unacceptable. If an individual does not fit in to the stereotype that society has constructed for male or female characteristics, they are treated as less than human. This establishes the phenomenon of cyber bullying, which creates tension in the idea of gender equality and ultimately diminishes hope for uniformity. As these adolescents grow and become adults, the stereotypes do not disappear.

Once adulthood is reached, it is often thought that all social pressure vanishes. This, however, is far from reality. Adults often face social pressures without realizing it. For example, the common stereotype that a woman is responsible for household labor while the man takes on

economic responsibility and does not participate in many household responsibilities (Coltrane, 2010). These stereotypes often lead to a lack of acceptance for those who do not abide by these norms. Although it has become less uncommon to see a stay at home dad taking care of what would normally be considered the “woman’s job”, it does not take away from the fact that this has already been established as a woman’s responsibility. This stereotype has been prevalent in society for an extended period of time and, although there has been an increase in dual-income families or stay at home dads, this stereotype still generally exists and still holds individuals to a standard that they must live up to. In a 20-year experiment performed to examine trends of gender stereotypes, there was evidence that these stereotypes and norms are deeply instituted in society and are quite resistant to change (Seguino, 2007). Society has constructed a sense of recognition but not support of a woman taking on economic responsibility while the man takes household responsibilities. Women who do engage in a professional workplace often find themselves spending less leisure time at home. This is often referred to as the “second shift”, due to the accumulated housework that adds up while she is away at work. It is also argued that women do the housework because they felt that it was their responsibility or due to some “genetic master plan”, not because it was a hobby (Kimmel, 2013, p. 157). Hobbies of an individual are often separated into what is acceptable as a woman or man’s hobby. There is a constant refusal to accept that men can enjoy an activity that is commonly known as a woman’s hobby. This creates a social aspect of stereotypes to be considered throughout adulthood.

Shopping is an activity that every individual participates in. Society has, once again, constructed stereotypes to turn an everyday activity into a skill for women and a chore for men. Shopping is no longer seen as just a responsibility, but as creative, fun, and a skill for women (Otnes, C., and McGrath. M. (2001). Although not all women may enjoy shopping and not all

men hate it, the majority is based off of stereotypical norms. This causes men to walk into a store with the attitude that he needs to get it over with as soon as possible or he is showing womanly traits. Society scrutinizes men who enjoy shopping, especially for clothes and shoes. This can be seen as the “fear of the feminine” phenomenon. There is an evidential suppression of men buying products with any sort of female connotation (Otnes, C., and McGrath, M., 2001). An unwritten set of rules has been established from these stereotypes that regulates the time a man should shop, how he should react, and where he should be shopping. If any of these unwritten rules are broken, he is subject to judgment not only by other men, but women as well. These stereotypes include the norm for men to participate in the “whine and wait” phenomenon. This phenomenon states that men should not enjoy shopping, and if they are forced to participate in a shopping trip, they are not to enjoy it by any means (Otnes, C., and McGrath, M., 2001). Gender stereotypes do not only affect personal interests and hobbies of each gender, but also alter the power to achieve success economically.

The power of negotiation in the economic world is essential to success. As stated in an academic article written by Laura Kray, “The clearest answer to the question of whether gender makes a difference in the deals that we make and how we negotiate to resolve conflict is simply yes.” (Kray, L., 2007). In this article, she also focuses on how ability to negotiate in an economic setting differs between genders. Gender stereotypes may prevent the ability of a woman to negotiate an economic opportunity to raise her benefits. It is often perceived that men are assertive while women are gentle and accepting. This creates gender inequality in the economic world, as an employer may not allow a woman to negotiate as much as they would allow a man to. Although this is not a characteristic of all employers, this is something that has been widely discussed and has become a controversy in today’s society.

Some may argue that there are plenty individuals of either gender that do not abide by these stereotypes and are socially accepted by those around them. This may be true, and these stereotypes may just be common characteristics of each gender. However, this argument only proves that there are some that are accepted despite these harsh judgments that are widely prevalent in our society. For the vast majority, it is expected that members of each gender do what they are socially expected, and if they do so, success in any aspect of life will be easier to achieve.

Gender stereotypes are active in all ages and in all aspects of life. These stereotypes cause members of either gender to be treated differently based on whether they fit in to these stereotypes or not. The list of common stereotypes placed upon each gender is endless, which is just another factor as to why they are truly preventing equality between the two. To achieve gender equality in today's patriarchal society, we must set aside the socially constructed expectations of each individual and express the right to be an individual to the truest definition. One must be different from others and society must accept these differences in order to achieve true equality.

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