

Gender roles in society essay

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Gender roles have a very dominant place in our society. Different families and cultures emphasize different roles for men and women. However, masculinity seems to dominate throughout the world. Women's role in society is always changing but femininity never seems to rise above its masculine counterpart. Gender asymmetry has been a struggle for a long time because of the uncertainty of how we learn such roles. How to act like a boy or a girl is not something biological we are just born with. These roles are learned through our interactions with family and peers, starting as early as birth.

The first and one of the strongest influences on a person's gender role is their parents. Parents are our first teachers and role models. They don't just teach us such basic skills like talking and walking, but also of attitudes and behavior. Most parents still hold traditional definitions of masculine and feminine and what kind of activities are appropriate for each. Parents tend to be more concerned with the safety of little girls. Whereas, boys are expected to be rough and tough at an early age. Most of the time parents are not even aware that they are teaching their kids some of these roles.

As discussed in the beginning of the text book, we are taught that our gender differences are due to our biology. We "tend to equate aggression with biological maleness and vulnerability with femaleness". This tendency to assume that biology is the cause for gender differences is known as "the pink and blue syndrome" (Spade and Valentine p. 4). Starting at birth we are put into certain colors and given specific gendered toys to play with. Sometimes these norms don't fit with every little boy or girl. Some girls

prefer to play rough and with more masculine toys, and some boys prefer pink and princesses.

However, when boys engage in activities that are normally deemed girly they are called a sissys. On the other hand when girls do things that would normally be boy activities they are considered a "tomboy" and praised for this. We looked at this more closely when we read Kane's chapter, "No Way My Boys are Going to be Like That!" Parents often encourage their daughters to aspire to take on male roles feeling as if it makes them a stronger person later in life. Fathers seem to be more concerned and often discourage boys in engaging in female roles, fearing they may be homosexual.

Mothers, on the other hand, more often feel that their sons knowing how to cook and clean makes them more well rounded. Even mothers seem to be kind of cautious and lack enthusiasm when speaking to their sons about these "iconic feminine items, attributes, or activities" (Kane p. 179). Overall, parents seem to be aware of gender as something that they must shape and construct, especially with their sons. Some parents even feel as if masculinity is something they must work on with their sons starting at a very young age.

In order to make a change we must "broaden normative conceptions of masculinity and challenge the devaluation of femininity, an effort that will require participation by heterosexual fathers to succeed" (Kane p. 183). Another very important group to consider that can have a strong influence on gender roles are peers. Peer pressure is another means of reinforcing a culture's traditional gender roles. It can come in the form of taunting or

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teasing a child who does not fit the traditional gender roles that other children in the peer group have come to expect. Peers react more positively to children who fit traditional gender roles.

We explored this teasing a bit more when we read the article “‘Dude, You’re a Fag’: Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse”. Pascoe discusses how masculinity can function as a regulatory mechanism of gender in American adolescent boys. It has been found that the word ‘fag’ is not necessarily directed at a homosexual boy, but has taken on a new meaning in school age boys. It is being used as a disciplinary mechanism to police certain behaviors “out of fear of having the fag identity permanently” (Pascoe p. 330). This kind of teasing and harassment can temporarily be placed on any boy who shows signs of weakness or femininity.

The high schoolers in the study told Pascoe that calling someone a fag was like telling them they were nothing or stupid (Pascoe p. 335). Boys could be called a fag for anything that he did that was opposite of masculine, even when it had nothing to do with his sexual preference. The fag discourse seemed to be just another way for the contest of masculinity to take place. With such strong enforcement of gender roles in children it is not surprising that these masculine dominated attitudes carry over into adulthood. Over the past few decades, great strides have been made by women in the workplace.

This increased number in women in the workplace does not mean equality however. Even with equal qualifications and achievements, women are still not given all the opportunities that men have. The chapter in the textbook, “Gender at Work”, shows us more of these inequalities in the <https://assignbuster.com/gender-roles-in-society-essay/>

workplace. Such inequalities cause gender segregation of jobs and can be linked with the pay inequality in the labor force. Even in jobs that are predominantly filled by women, men earn more than women. Women are often stereotyped as being family focused and not as able to travel, therefore they tend to get passed up for promotions (Garson p. 353).

This invisible barrier that keeps women from moving up the executive ladder is referred to as the “ glass ceiling” (Baxter and Wright p. 346). Women also tend to do more domestic work, or unpaid labor and caregiving. This extra unpaid work is referred to as “ the third shift” and is largely rested on the shoulders of women (Gersel p. 352). Consequently, this seems to be one of the biggest things holding women back from taking on jobs that are normally considered male dominated. These shifts in gender roles over the years have been huge. With the drastic changes, men and women are still trying to sort out what these new roles mean to them.

Although women are no longer expected to be the soul keepers of the house, in reality, they still are in most families. Although men generally seem to be open to the successes enjoyed by the women they share their lives with, some still find it hard to celebrate a woman's achievements because they feel it diminishes their own masculinity. These patterns will continue as long as our society keeps pushing the importance of gendered roles and the dominance of masculinity. However, today's parents have the opportunity to show their children that they don't have to be violent to be strong, and being sensitive is not necessarily a bad thing.