

Rachel N. Clift

Ms. Darrough

A.P. English Language & Composition

16 July 2017

The Hindrance of Gender Roles
and the Prolonged Struggle for Gender Equality

Gender equality, for some a societally idealistic concept, for others a seemingly impossible dream to achieve, and for everyone the topic of a long social and economic battle worldwide, means something different to countless individuals across the globe. Many conjecture the elimination of gender roles to be the key to equality among the sexes. Perhaps the abolishment of gender roles and gender stereotypes will only lead humanity part of the way to the justice that so many crave. Gender equality is the fair and equal treatment of men and women by society, and over time, this fair and equal treatment has been twisted due to influential constituents such as science, the media, and human nature.

While sexism affects both men and women worldwide, women, by many, are believed to have fought a possibly harder and longer fight to achieve certain rights believed in numerous people's minds to be basic human rights, such as the right to vote in the United States. The promotion of women's rights on the premise of the equity and equal rights of the sexes is commonly known as feminism. In Katrin Bennhold and Rick Gladstone's piece for *The New York Times* titled, "Over 70 Nations Have Been Led by Women. So Why Not the U.S.?", the authors scrutinize which nations have been governed by females and why the United States is not one of them. In the article, a quote taken from senior research scientist Sue Thomas from the

Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in Santa Cruz, California, is used to suggest a possible reason behind the United States' inability to elect a female leader; she says that "unlike political leadership posts elsewhere, the American presidency 'is seen as a very masculine institution that for historical reasons is extremely hard for a female to approach'" (Bennhold and Gladstone 5). While Thomas may have a point about the American presidency being seen as a masculine position, one may argue that in modern times, the logic behind men continuing to be elected by the American people may have to do with the understanding of personality differences between men and women as well as the history behind their personality dissimilarities and career choices. Jobs that pay less and require more maternal skills and a calmer, kinder, and more patient personality such as nursing and teaching are seen as female-dominated jobs, whereas higher paying jobs and jobs requiring a fair amount of leadership, such as careers in engineering as well as managing large corporations are considered male-dominated jobs. Men are believed by many to have stronger and more dominant personalities, whereas women are usually seen as softer and more maternal. Although for some individuals these patterns hold true, perhaps because of how male and female hormones work, countless men and women have spoken out about how their personalities differ from typical boy-girl stereotypes, and how gender has been twisted societally through the media to appear very black and white. This stereotyping on the basis of sex, commonly to the detriment of women, is widely known as sexism, and the evolution of sexism throughout the decades is why there are countless people in the United States and worldwide who discriminate against women. Bennhold and Gladstone wrote just after the 2016 election, for example, that "Hillary Clinton got closer than any American woman to the nation's top job but her loss this week has thrown a spotlight back on the question: Why has the United

States lagged behind so many countries around the world in choosing a female leader?”

(Bennhold and Gladstone 1). Clinton’s loss not only showed a woman’s inability to win the presidential election when up against a man, but even the inability to win against a man “accused of multiple sexual assaults who has made degrading comments about women” (Bennhold and Gladstone 24). “Other male leaders, too, are seen as misogynists,” infer Bennhold and Gladstone looking at other countries around the world who have struggled to watch women step into high positions of leadership in their nations (Bennhold and Gladstone 24). Perhaps the reason that misogynist male leaders make it into power is due to qualities that are believed to make a good leader such as toughness and even a bit of ruthlessness, and a man who is bold enough to say such things about women may come across as brave to people. Some believe that a strong nationalistic stance is a crucial characteristic of a successful leader. Sexism from a man implies that the man believes he is better than women, and some may draw a parallel from such arrogance to a feeling of superiority when it comes to his country. Some believe that the reason gender roles in society have not died out yet is because children are still being raised with them, not just in the media, but with influence from their parents as well.

While avoiding gender-specific television shows and toys based on the gender of one’s child has trended within numerous families across the United States and even worldwide, many young girls are still only being raised with shows, movies, and toys such as *Barbie* and *My Little Pony* and many young boys are still only being raised with shows, movies, and toys such as *Bob the Builder* and *Thomas the Tank Engine*. Some parents disagree with always dressing female children in pink and always dressing male children in blue as well. Ariana Eunjung Cha of *The Washington Post* claims in her article titled “Fathers Sing More to Daughters and Roughhouse

with Sons, Study Finds,” that after a thorough study organized by researcher Jennifer Mascaro observing the difference between how a number of fathers communicated with their daughters in comparison with how they communicated with their sons (Eunjung Cha 1), it was shown that fathers will more commonly talk about emotions with girls, whereas with sons, far less emotion was displayed (Eunjung Cha 9). In an attempt to explain the outcome of the study and what roughhousing does to the minds of boys, Eunjung Cha writes that “all social mammals do this play when they are young, and scientists have theorized that it may be important training for social competence” (Eunjung Cha 11). Perhaps boys being raised to be highly competitive through this physical play with their fathers is why men tend to be more aggressive and zealous than many women, making them appear stronger and more fit to hold high nationalistic positions in countries such as the United States. One may argue that powerful women do exist as well, and that many women are brought up in a competitive environment, and are naturally just as ruthless. While the environment in which one is raised could most definitely play a large role in personality development, and while it is also true that boys are commonly raised to be rougher and more competitive, it is also clear that people are born with different personalities that do not have anything to do with their gender. Therefore, naturally competitive and powerful women are most definitely out there, but are often marginalized due to society’s apparent need to hold onto gender roles, perhaps because these gender roles have created the shape of the cultural and traditional aspects of the country that so many value and are familiar with today.

Culture and tradition are widely esteemed in modern American society. “Culture sells the idea of a ‘perfect woman.’ Girls are taught to aspire to it, boys learn to expect it. A woman should be sexy, not slutty. She must be strong, but also sweet. She should speak up, but not too

loudly. She should be competent, but not aggressive. Remember to smile. Not so big,” writes Alia E. Dastagir in her piece for *USA Today* (Dastagir 6). While countless may argue that gender roles are part of this culture and tradition, others maintain that the people of the United States should move forward in recognizing men and women as equals in every part of society; for example, acknowledging and detesting that men still make more than women for doing the same job, or that women often find themselves in the same field as men, but doing a different more maternal job that does not pay as well, such as nursing. Dastagir says that “a woman who is interested in medicine may lean toward becoming a nurse over a doctor, because she believes nursing is more suitable for motherhood” (Dastagir 34). This may be true because of the traditional belief that women should pick less powerful and potentially less time-consuming jobs, because they are expected to stay at home and mother children. Additionally, women often frame their future careers around being a mother, and the assumption that their partners will not take care of the parenting most of the time (Dastagir 35).

While the struggle for gender equality around the globe has been a long and rough one, many believe that humans worldwide have made great progress and are continuing to do so. In the United States, it has become clear that numerous people still flounder with the idea of a female president. With the control that sexism and gender roles have gained in modern American society over many aspects of the culture and traditional social behavior in the country, it is sometimes difficult to see the riddance of gender roles as an achievable goal to be reached anytime soon. Gender equality is the fair and equal treatment of men and women by society. While this fair and equal treatment *has* been twisted over time, the battle to achieve equality among the sexes has come a long way from where it started.

Works Cited

- Bennhold, Katrin, and Rick Gladstone. "Over 70 Nations Have Been Led by Women. So Why Not the U.S.?" *The New York Times*. 10 Nov. 2016,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/11/world/europe/women-world-leaders-clinton-trump.html>. Accessed 16 June 2017.
- Dastagir, Alia E. "You're Sexist. And So Am I." *USA Today*. 23 March 2017,
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/03/23/everyone-is-sexist-internalized-sexism/99528476/>. Accessed 16 June 2017
- Eunjung Cha, Ariana. "Fathers Sing More to Daughters and Roughhouse with Sons, Study Finds." *The Washington Post*. 7 June 2017,
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2017/06/07/fathers-sing-more-to-daughters-and-roughhouse-with-sons-study-finds/?utm_term=.ebedcdedc1043.
 Accessed 16 June 2017.