

Can gender stereotypes ever be eliminated? Discuss.

Gender stereotypes are a social construct which everyone has an innate tendency to develop as they grow up in society. The modern society has indeed come a long way in ensuring gender equality and advocating equal rights for both men and women, allowing the previously oppressed gender to be emancipated and given more opportunities to prove their self-worth and banish any attached stereotypes. From religious states like Saudi Arabia to secular states like the United States of America, it is evident that the success of the elimination of gender stereotypes hinges upon the beliefs of the government as well as the extent of affirmative action it is willing to undertake to address the social disparity between genders.

To start off, gender stereotypes can never be wiped out completely because they are an integral part of the social construct that we form as we make sense of the society we live in. Gender stereotypes may be extremely entrenched depending on the upbringing of the individual, and are sometimes tied to religious beliefs. For example, in states with an extremely strong Islamic following, there is a very disparaging stereotype of women who are regarded as meek and are of a lower-class in society. Even though such states like Saudi Arabia and Iran are making progress in curbing gender inequality, gender stereotypes still remain very much evident in these societies. This is primarily due to the deeply entrenched beliefs that have an extremely large influence on people's lives, especially so if these beliefs have been circulating around for centuries and are intrinsically embedded into the local culture.

Despite religious states having a stronger inclination towards having rooted gender stereotypes, such are still apparent in semi-secular states like Singapore, which has male-dominated fields like engineering and technical work. Granted that some of these careers are more physically demanding, but how can one explain the appalling small fraction of women in parliament? With meritocracy in place, one can only argue that the reason for the small number is because of stereotypes that women lack the ability to hold a position in the cabinet, a realm which previously used to be predominantly male. Even if there is increasingly more women getting a seat in the parliament today, there has only been a 20 percent increase in female members of parliament since the first one was elected in 1985. This shows that the rate at which it is happening is extremely slow and does not provide a convincing stance that gender stereotypes have been eliminated from society. Hence, as a result of ingrained stereotypes that shape the way we perceive a certain gender and their associated behaviours and ability, gender stereotypes can never be eliminated.

Gender stereotypes can also never be fully eliminated from society because of systemic impositions like laws and policies that further perpetuate already deeply-entrenched gender stereotypes in society. More often than not, these laws were established by non-secular governments which run society based on whatever is written in the sacred word. For example, Iran has a law which dictates that women are only allowed education up to the secondary level and taking up any further studies will result in severe punishment. This has an extremely detrimental effect on stereotypes of women as not only would women be perceived as an ignorant, uneducated and therefore, weaker gender, they are systemically denied of a chance to pursue higher education to break these stereotypes that the other gender has of them. Hence, the elimination of gender stereotypes is highly elusive.

Even though gender stereotypes are ubiquitous in every society, it is simply unfair to ignore governments' efforts to curb them. For example, in Finland, the government has granted fathers the same amount, if not a greater number of days to stay at home and take care of a new born

baby. This policy was implemented by the local government in a bid to dissolve the gender stereotypes that women ought to be homemakers while men should go out and labour for the family. The results of this policy are very promising, with about 60 percent of fathers having embraced this policy and taken up the job of being a homemaker. As a result, there is a culture of “Stay-At-Home Dads” being developed in Finland, evidence of how some gender stereotypes may be eliminated as long as governments are willing to put in place incentives for them to be challenged.

Despite governments being able to influence the way society perceives both genders to a certain extent, this does not mean that gender stereotypes can be fully eliminated from society as they are, ultimately, ingrained in people’s minds and are unlikely to be totally wiped out. For example, even after Manal al-Shariff, the first female driver in Saudi Arabia managed to convince her government that women ought to be allowed to drive legally, she did not gain the full support of the population as many, women included, still have the firm belief that women should not be given the same rights and privileges as men. This shows that sometimes the oppressed gender may accept and believe in their gender stereotypes so much that even positive actions made by the government to curb gender inequality are faced with disdain. As such, government’s efforts do not necessarily guarantee the elimination of gender stereotypes and hence gender stereotypes can never be eliminated.

All in all, due to our culture and upbringing which shape the way we think and interact, gender stereotypes are deeply-rooted in our lifestyles and will always continue to be. Despite tangible efforts made to curb them, one cannot truly eradicate gender stereotypes as it is human nature to form impressions of the people around us. Even though on the surface level, gender stereotypes may seem to have been eliminated by affirmative action, it may not be the case in people’s minds, which are not always manifested into words or actions. Hence, gender stereotypes can never be truly eliminated.

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