
The Problematic Manifestation Of Toxic Gender Roles

INTRO

People everyday are surrounded by images and ideals that dictate how people should behave, feel, and generally how they should exist as a whole. Much of this imagery is based solely on the gender that society deems the individual to be. Most societies decide roles for genders of that society that often lean to an extreme set of expectations for each gender. These extreme roles often have a perceived harmful impact, known as toxic gender roles. While there won't be articles stating toxic gender roles in the headlines, this social problem often results in the manifestation of other social issues like violence and sexism.

DEFINING GENDER ROLES

Before understanding how gender roles can manifest into other social issues, one must first understand gender roles and its toxic nature. Planned Parenthood defines gender roles as rules of "how we're expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex" (2020). Since gender is a societal concept, the roles will be assigned to the genders of that society. While many societies adopt many genders, this paper will focus on societies that make use of a binary gender system that features only male and female. Gender roles are assigned to these two genders and often feature only one type of personality and behavior for each gender. Due to the belief of only two genders these roles quickly become toxic and unobtainable for most people who cannot conform to the one personality as well as for those who do not assign to the binary genders. This has become known as "Toxic Masculinity" and "Toxic Femininity."

Toxic Masculinity

Toxic masculinity focuses on the roles that are assigned to those categorized in the male gender and sex. These roles for men often tell men that they have to be strong and tough, or "macho". "Toxic masculinity is what can come of teaching boys that they can't express emotion openly; that they have to be 'tough all the time'; that anything other than that makes them "feminine" or weak" (Salem 2019). When men are told they cannot express themselves openly or emotionally it takes form as aggression and violence. This can be extremely harmful to boys and men as they will not be able to cope with normal emotions and will oftentimes become harmful to either themselves or those around them. This is especially harmful to those who are assigned as different genders or even those who are part of the LGBTQ community. Men who cannot conform to these roles can often times turn to drugs, violence, and even suicide. When that aggression is not turned on themselves, it can turn on others. Clarence Page of the Chicago Tribune makes the connection that media, sports, and the military often link masculinity to men acting aggressive. Page goes on further to state that a Remington's ad features a military assault rifle with the headline "Consider Your Man Card Reissued" (2019). This style of ads and masculinity is thought to be a cause of mass shootings which are overwhelmingly performed by men. One example is the Pulse club shooting, which was an attack on those who did not conform to sexuality and gender roles.

Toxic Femininity

Toxic Femininity results from the toxic gender roles that apply to those assigned into the female gender. Traits that fall under this femininity include “passivity, empathy, sensuality, patience, tenderness, and receptivity” (Savin-Williams 2019). Savin-Williams goes on further to state that these traits often result in women ignoring their own needs for the sake of others. Toxic femininity acts as a benefit to others, usually men, at the detriment of women. (2019). Women are told they need to internalize their emotions and put up with others' behavior rather than speak out. This behavior was first designed as women were supposed to listen to what the men said and not speak out and have not been updated to modern times. This highlights how gender roles came from, as well as, actively maintain a patriarchal society in the basic roots of how people are told to act. Toxic femininity “encourages the silent acceptance of violence and domination in order to survive ... It's a thing women do to keep our value” (Savin-Williams 2019). These expectations are more likely to increase a woman's chance of mental illness rather than violence, though it is possible, than it is in men. While men are told to externalize and act aggressively, women are told to internalize it and not speak out. Because of this, women are subjected to sexist comments when they do not conform to the ideals. Women in leaderships will be put down for doing the same as their male counterparts simply for being female. Most recently Michigan Governor Whitmer is facing sexist backlash over her handling over the pandemic. Malachi Barret states that “Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has been cast as an overbearing mother, a nanny, witch, queen and a menopausal teacher punishing her students with edicts to prevent the spread of COVID-19.” Barret goes on further to state that she was accused of being too stupid to run a state and has also been called a “tyrant B---h” (2020). These are insults clearly attached to her womanhood and would not have been stated to a male governor. This is an example of the Glass Ceiling Theory that women have to endure when trying to hold positions of power.

POLICIES AND MOVEMENTS

The issue society faces with gender roles is that it is hard to find or make specific policies that combat this social issue. Unfortunately and fortunately there is no single policy that can be discussed when talking about gender roles. The best policies that aimed to beat these gender roles are any policy that aimed for equality. The 19th amendment gave women the right to vote which in turn gave them more representation. With more representation it allowed women to make changes that aimed to change their assigned roles. The 15th amendment granted african americans the right to vote. With their own set of gender roles they were now able to make changes and shift the view further. Most recently the right to gay marriage made the LGBTQ communiuty more accepted. The acceptance of the LGBTQ community in itself will not only change gender roles themselves but will open societies up to the idea that there are more than the Binary genders.

CONCLUSION

When gender roles dictate how people should act based on their assigned gender it can quickly turn Toxic. When men are told they can't act emotional it often leads to acts of violence and aggression towards themselves and others. Women are told to be subservient and not speak out which leads to attacks and sexism towards them when in positions of power. The spread of equality allows society to step away from these toxic gender roles by broadening the idea of

genders entirely and the roles assigned to each one.

References

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