Original Oratory

“The Roles We Play”

When I was little I loved princesses, my favorite was Sleeping Beauty. But growing up I couldn’t help but notice how the princess was always getting saved by a prince. Rapunzel, saved by a hair climbing hero. Snow White, awoken by a kiss from a king. Jasmine whisked away on a flying carpet by a street rat. And Sleeping Beauty, saved from an evil dragons sleeping curse by…. you guessed it, a prince. I would sit wide eyed in front of the tv while the prince battled the dragon to save the poor helpless princess asleep in a castle. And playing on the playground my friends and I would wait on top of the slides while the boys tried to “save us.” When I was little I never thought about it like that but now that I’m older I am determined to save myself.

And it all boils down to Gender roles, they affect every aspect of a human’s life from before they are born to after they die. It is defined by the oxford dictionary as “The role or behavior learned by a person as appropriate to their gender, determined by the prevailing cultural norms.” Now that we know what gender roles mean, I’m now going to use sleeping beauties story to tell my own. Today I will, like Sleeping Beauty’s fairy god mothers, gift you with knowledge on how gender roles affect us starting at a young age. Then we will prick our fingers and dream about how gender roles and gender equality are linked together. After that we will battle the dragon while I explain the ways gender roles can lead to bullying and depression. And finally we will wake up and conclude why we need to break the rules of gender roles.

To start, let’s talk about how gender roles start affecting us from the moment we are born. Adults treat male and female babies differently. Phycologists say that they probably do this because they were recipients of the same gender expectations when they were growing up. Parents most of the time reinforce gender stereotypes without even knowing it. It’s scientifically proven that people are more careful and cautious with female infants versus male infants. But stereotypes like that don’t just apply to babies, toddlers all the way to adults are also treated like this. Girls are perceived as delicate and weak while boys are supposed to be manly and strong, but not all men and women are like this. There are tons of women who are anything but weak and there are men that do not consider themselves manly. Little boys are expected to play sports and girls are told to cook, clean, and take care of others.

From a CNN article on how gender roles effect children, they simply put it, “More than biology, family, friends and society influence impressions of what it means to be a boy or girl…” Children are so used to these standards that they use them to determine the gender of others. Research shows that infants can tell the difference between males and females as early as their first year. If a preschooler sees someone with long hair they assume their female and if the hairs short, they assume male. That’s just what they grew up with. What’s more is that they begin to form gender stereotypes as soon as they know if they are a boy or girl. Toys also play huge parts in reinforcing gender roles. I have two-year-old cousins that are twins (a girl and boy of course), and at their second birthday party they received tons of toys. Trucks and tools for Wesley and a doll for Lilee dressed in a pink dress, but what really caught my attention was if Wes picked up the doll and started caring it around everyone joked about it and laughed. Why was so weird that a two-year-old wanted to play with a doll or his sister wanted to play with his trucks? Toys are advertised specifically for certain genders and on television commercials or toy packaging it is always the appropriate gender using it. they also tend to be advertised for jobs or hobbies that are assumed to be for an either a man or a woman. Dolls for girls who should be mothers, and cars and tools for boys so they can become mechanics. To back up my point an article from the guardian states that toy choices, should be based on kids’ personal interests, and not on their gender. “All toys are gender neutral, what is not neutral is the way toys are marketed.”

But what can adults do to stop forcing gender roles onto children. It’s not like we can control how companies will advertise their toys or how others will influence your kids. An article from parents.com gives a few examples on how to limit the amount of gender stereotypes you as a parent open children to such as, encouraging mixed-gender playdates or reinforcing behaviors that shatter stereotypes. Types of behaviors include standing up for women’s rights or liking to play rough and be outdoors. Transformers star Megan Fox was scrutinized for letting her son wear an Elsa dress, people commenting things on the photo like "Your boy MUST be a MAN, what a shameful time to grow up." But combating those comments were a slew of supporters saying “My son rocks an Elsa dress almost daily,” while another added, “Let kids be kids.” Fox isn’t the only person to receive hate for things like this and there is a trend of more and more support for these types of parenting choices.

Now it’s time to prick our fingers a dream about how gender roles and gender equality are linked. A lot has changed in the equal rights of men and women since sleeping beauty’s time but one thing is for sure, we have a long way to go. Once upon a dream I thought I could be anything I wanted but according to my genders rules that’s not the case. The bureau of labor statistics shows that there has been a 27% increase off the amount of women between 25-54 that are working outside of the home, and that number is still increasing from the 50% it was at in 1970. But just because the amount of working women is increasing doesn’t mean that they are getting the top spots the men are. Out of 500 companies only 90 of them have women as CEO’s, that’s only 18%. That means 82% of CEO’s are male. Also Multiple polls show a majority of Americans believe that women are discriminated against in getting such well-paying positions as men. It’s a phenomenon called the “glass ceiling effect.” Meaning women can only rise so far in a job but once they hit that ceiling they can’t go any higher, but last time I checked glass is pretty fragile.

Emma Watson, a famous actress and women’s rights activists says, “Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong, it is a time were we perceive gender on a spectrum and not two opposing sets of ideas.” Watson is a strong believer in the equal rights of men and women. She often reminds us that gender roles do not confine us and we should no longer be prisoners of societies jail house. It is an uphill battle, the fight for equal rights, but with a growing number of supporters we are on the way to winning the battle, not of the genders but for the genders.

Now speaking of battles its time to fight a dragon, because this is one of the worst but probably the most important reason why gender roles need to be loosened, because fighting a dragon is pretty bad but very important to getting to the waking up part. Gender roles can pressure people into being a different person then who they want to be and that can lead to bulling, depression, and even suicide. Men are 4x more likely to commit suicide partly because according to society they have to provide for a family and be the man of the house. Men and women also tend to bully others who don’t live up to the gender roles. People who identify as transgender are 40% more likely to attempt suicide and 83% more likely if their family and friends disown them because of their choices. People are harsh, and even more harsh to people who don’t act or look like what society says we should. According to an article from The Conversation, bullying related to gender and sexuality goes unnoticed in schools and 80% of students will receive some sort of gender related bullying in school and most will receive it over and over throughout their lives. We know bullying can lead to depression and in extreme cases suicide, so if gender roles lead to a lot of bullying, then why aren’t we changing something. Something is obviously wrong because no one should feel inclined to want to end their life for being who they want to be.

Finally let’s wake up and face the facts, society needs to change the way gender roles affects the everyday lives of people. It’s time to stop gender roles from controlling our lives. We need to quit forcing them onto our youth and continuing society’s rein of how we grow up and perceive gender. Also changing gender roles can help advance in getting gender equality for the world, breaking that glass ceiling, and aiding in the battle for the genders. But most importantly we need to break the rules of gender roles because people take their lives because of some rules society has laid out for us. I dream of a day when todays strict gender roles will be a thing of the past and Sleeping beauty herself puts it best with a quote I hold close to my heart saying, “Yes, it's only in my dreams. But they say if you dream a thing more than once, it's sure to come true.” Thank you.

Works Cited

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