SOC 105-102

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Gender Role Stereotypes and Their Impact on the Collective Consciousness

One thing that has always confused me about today's society is the question, why are men and women treated so unequally? Why are women held to such a high standard when it comes to their presentation? And finally, why is it frowned upon for men to be emotional? All of these questions, I have learned, are a part of the collective consciousness in terms of gender roles and gender stereotypes. Men and women have been treated unequally for centuries, and there are plenty of stereotypes for both genders; telling us how to act, what to dress like, how we are supposed to interact with our counterparts, and so on and so forth.

Although these stereotypes are still present in today's society, I can confidently back up the statement that the collective consciousness has adjusted in the past few decades and has become more in favor of abolishing gender roles and becoming more gender equal. Undoubtedly, there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of getting society as a whole to come together and change the way gender roles have impacted our society. However, there are many more people today that are aware of the inequalities between men and women, and even more people fighting for our right to be treated equally. As an end result of this newfound education and awareness, the collective consciousness has been reformed into a welcoming, confident mindset that will fight for equality and stand up for what we think is right.

the wage gap. Depending on the state, there is still a decently large wage gap between men and women. For example, in North Carolina, women on average make 14% less than men per year, and in some states, like Wyoming, the percentage can even jump to as high as a 35% difference in annual wages. There are multiple reasons why the wage gap happens, including lack of funding to female-owned businesses, unequal starting rates between men and women employees, sexism in smaller corporations, and an overall lack of laws prohibiting the inequality of wages.

The collective consciousness was a term created by Emile Durkheim that describes a set of shared beliefs in a collective society, determining what is socially perceived as "good" and "bad". It can also determine what is morally right and wrong, and what the majority of the collective agrees on. Because times are always changing and society is progressing more towards equality, the collective consciousness can change over time. The collective consciousness plays a role in societal opinions and the generalized ideology of what is seen as "normal" or "abnormal". In present day society, it is a common tendency to think that men have to be strong, dominant, in control, and not able to express or show their own emotions. It is also a common thought that women have to be fragile, small, and under control of their male counterparts. Men are seen as the "breadwinners" of a stereotypical heterosexual relationship, where women have been expected to be the caretakers of everyone else, including their husbands, children and even around the house. It is a common misconception that men have to be the masculine presenting ones, and women have to be the feminine presenting ones.

I would also like to state that not all men are masculine presenting or male passing, and not all women are feminine presenting or female passing. Society gives us a standard and expectation to follow on how we need to behave, act, what our interests should be, and who we

pass, as. This mindset is incredibly toxic. Taking into account the men and women in the transgender community, they are faced with even more struggles and judgement from the collective when it comes to gender roles. As a person who identifies as non-binary, but is a female at birth and feminine presenting, it is a daily struggle to express how even though I may look like a girl, I do not feel like one nor identify as one. Not all non-binary people are androgynous, and although there are still people who understand that, it is not a widely understood concept, which can be confusing to the majority of the collective. This confusion and lack of ability to express one's gender identity adds to the stress and mental drainage of going against these stereotypical gender roles. Abiding to these roles may seem easy, but transphobic and homophobic comments from society can make it extremely hard to feel comfortable within my own skin.

One specific essay that I would like to bring attention to is named *Gender and Society,* written by Candace West and Jon H. Zimmerman. This essay talks about the impacts of gender roles in society, and one specific part stuck out to me. The quote, "Agnes faced an ongoing task of *being* a woman, something beyond style of dress (an identification display) or allowing men to light cer cigarette (a gender display). Her problem was to produce configurations of behavior that would be seen by others as normative gender behavior." (Page 134). This quote I believe can be used to help further my point of the mental damage that gender roles have on society. Agnes came out as a transgender woman in 1987, in which she had to deal with the abnormality of going against her assigned sex. Back in the 1980's, identifying as transgender was not a normal thing to hear. She had to deal with the many gender roles she had to protest against, including getting rid of the stigma that all "men" are masculine and dominant, and that all "women" are

transgender community, at the same time as protesting toxic gender roles and stereotypes that had been put upon her and others since they were born.

Gender and sex are two different things, sex being the biological chromosomes you were assigned with at birth, and gender being the identity of the person. Gender identity, alongside sexuality, is fluid, meaning it can change over time. It is more common than not to go through different identities in your life before finding one that suits you. Some people, however, can go through their whole life not knowing exactly what they identify as. This is completely okay, as there is no deadline to figure out your identity.

With this being said, it is understandable for non-cisgender people, meaning people who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, to experience more first-hand the toxicity of gender roles against the collective consciousness. Over the past two decades, the rise of awareness towards the transgender, non-binary and genderqueer community has thouroughly impacted the major shift of the collective consciousness. Normalizing non-cisgender people has also helped majorly in the abolishment of gender roles, considering that not everyone identifies as the same two genders, male and female.

As society is progressing every day, there are more and more people protesting these stereotypes and expectations for gender roles. More people are educating others, and being educated on the subject and learning just how harmful this mindset is for all of us as a collective. Society has come a long way as a whole in the past one or two decades, which has majorly shifted the collective consciousness in terms of gender roles and gender identity, however, there is still a long way to go. Depending on who you surround yourself with, you can have different opinions on what is morally "right" and "wrong" when it comes to gender roles and gender

welcoming and understanding of getting rid of gender roles and promoting equality between all genders.

The rise of education on the topic of gender equality has thoroughly impacted the change of the collective consciousness, shifting it into a more welcoming and inclusive mindset. With people fighting every day and protesting to gain equality, I can say with hope that society will become a more gender-neutral environment, and treat everyone the same.

Overall I can completely agree with the fact that society is progressing in a positive direction, and even though we still have a lot of work to do as a collective, the normalization of abolishing gender roles has skyrocketed over the past few decades. Of course this did not come easy, with things such as Agnes fighting for her rights and the rights of the trasngender and transsexual community in 1987, normalizing the fact that beig cisgender was not always the case, and endless protests in favor of womens rights, equal pay, and gender equality. Going back to my previous statement about the wage gap, the size of the wage gap has decreased significantly since the 1990's, as a result of more people becoming aware that men and women should be getting equal pay. This is also a result of an increase of female-run businesses across the country, and the rise of women empowerment when it comes to standing up for their rights.

The collective consciousness has shifted from a mindset that promotes male superiority, with women almost seen as the "side-kicks", to a more inclusive, open-minded ideology that women and men are everybody in between are all equal, and that your gender identity should not define what oppression and judgement you should face in society. The world is becoming more inclusive and welcoming every day, and it is all thanks to people fighting for the rights of themselves and others on a daily basis.