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**“A Tale of Two Genders: Shifts in Perceptions”**

The gender or sexual double standard has existed in human society ever since human society was even formed. It was, in fact, a normal and even accepted reality for many people. The double standard unfortunately promotes and condones inequality between genders and fosters injustice in many aspects of a person's daily life. In modern times though, many wonder if the gender or sexual double standard has changed or even has disappeared. That is the goal of this paper, to uncover and express the changes that have occurred in the gender or sexual double standard over the past decade or so.

To begin with, it is important to understand the meaning of a double standard. Merriam Webster defines it as “a situation in which two people, groups, etc., are treated very differently from each other in a way that is unfair to one of them “ (Merriam-Webster.com). In the sense of the gender double standard, there are many situations where these prejudices occur; and there have also been changes in these situations over the years. These changes can be collated into three main criteria where the double standard is most prevalent. Sexual interaction, professional life and crime are the three key areas where in the gender or sexual double standard has changed over the past decade.

In the past, the sexual or gender double standard was more prevalent and accepted. This is especially true for sexual interaction, where in men and women were held to different standards when it came to sexual interaction. For instance, a study done in 1995 revealed that when women were the ones who brought a condom to a sexual encounter, they were rated negatively by others, women included. Men, on the other hand, were rated positively when they were the ones who brought the contraceptive (Hynie and Lydon 563). This shows that, back

then, people believed that it was uncharacteristic and even improper for a woman to be prepared for a sexual encounter, probably because it was considered scandalous for a woman to be having unplanned sex. Yet based on the results, men, who were rated positively in the study, were expected to have, and even admired for having, a contraceptive since it was a common stigma that men were more likely to be engaging in unexpected sex. This coincides with the ideas presented by Crawford and Popp in 2003. They state that “[w]omen were stigmatized for engaging in any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage, whereas for men such behavior was expected and rewarded” (Crawford and Popp 2). This is to say that majority of society considered it acceptable for men to be sexually active outside of marriage, yet for women it was strange for them to engage in such behavior. In fact, the stigma that was rampant for women was that “[they] were faced with a Madonna-whore dichotomy: They were either pure and virginal or promiscuous and easy” (Crawford and Popp 2). This means that, back then, society held that women could only be two ends of a sexual spectrum; they could either be innocent or immoral. In summary, it is clear to see that women were given certain discriminations that made them unequal in terms of sexual interaction compared to men.

Another factor affected by the double standard in the past was the professional life of people. Unsurprisingly, much like the inequality in terms of sexual interaction, men were much more successful in their professional lives than women. Baxter and Wright discuss a possible reason behind this called the “glass ceiling”, which is the limit to which women can be promoted. Under it they are capable of being promoted, but once they hit this barrier, they cannot (Baxter and Wright 275). Back then, it was not always believed to be a real wall or visible, hence the “glass” part of the term, but the ceiling became known to many women once they realized they were stuck in a professional rut, unable to progress in their careers because of a double standard. The reason behind the “glass ceiling” could be attributed to the long-standing idea that many have that men are more suited in positions of power. Shaun Rein also proposes another reason that it’s simply because women were not likely to ask for promotions or raises as

frequently as men (Rein). This again drew from the society's expectation and view of women back then as inferior and more passive than men, and many women actually conformed to these notions. In line with this, there was also a noticeable wage or pay gap between men and women who had the same jobs. In Blau and Kahn's paper they discuss the Female-To-Male earnings ratios of Full-Time Workers from 1995-2003. They found that from 1955 to 1995, the wage of women compared to men changed from 65% to about 75% (Blau and Kahn 844). Though there was an increase in the percentages, the fact that women were only earning a fraction of what their male counterparts were earning is blatant evidence of the gender double standard in the past. Essentially, there was a clear discrimination and a clear application of the gender double standard in the workplace in the past, and it was mostly for the benefit of males.

However, the gender double standard that favored men did not apply to all aspects. There was a sexual or gender double standard that favored women when it came to crime. In fact, in a study done in 2006, it was revealed that "[i]n terms of similarities, results ... [showed] that incarcerated females [were] treated preferentially compared to males —receiving, on average, sentences that [averaged] 3.22 years less than those of males" (Rodriguez *et al.* 333). In addition, it was also concluded that a great bulk of previous research revealed that male offenders received much harsher sentences than female criminals (Rodriguez *et al.* 319). What this means is that there was a bias in the justice system that favored women in the past. Women were given shorter and more lenient sentences than men. The reason behind this could, once again, be the idea that females were much more passive than males. Society held women as meek and softer than men, and thus less culpable. It might have even gone as far as that women were weaker than men, and therefore deserved more lenient treatment. This stigma that women were weaker and men were stronger did not only affect women however. The idea that men must be strong and dominant became a bane against men as well. For instance, male rape was not commonly believed in back then. Male rape, which refers to the nonconsensual and forced sex on a man, was actually something that was not recognized. Strangely, "[i]n 2003, one in every ten

rape victims was male” (SECASA), yet this was still the case. This was a problem because the stigma those males had forced them to act strong and dominant. Any weakness would be taken against them, and as such it was not uncommon for many male rape victims to abstain from reporting what happened and to seek medical attention out fear that their sexuality or strength would be questioned (SECASA). Additionally, many victims feel that the assault was somehow their fault, since they were unable to protect themselves, something that society believed a man should be able to do (Rochman). What this shows is that, in the past, males were afraid and ashamed of getting raped, and society actually judged them for it because they were considered lesser men. This is the gender double standard at work, since men and women were being held to different standards, even if they were placed in the same situations. Clearly, the gender double standard did not benefit males in the case of crime, especially when it came to rape.

It is obvious, therefore, that the gender double standard was prevalent in the past. In addition, it was largely not beneficial for both genders, but mostly the females were affected. Undoubtedly, the past was a time of inequality and bias, but what of the present? Has society changed the gender double standard?

Based on recent research, the answer is mostly a resounding “slightly”. To start off, in terms of sexual interaction, there have been minimum changes. For instance, a study revealed that “boys are [still] rewarded for sexually permissive behavior” (Kreager and Staff). Similar to that of the past, men are still held in high regard for being sexually successful and popular, while “sexually permissive girls still ... have fewer [friendships]” (Kreager and Staff). This means that even after a decade the sexual or gender double standard still affects the sexual interaction of men and women. In fact in another study, the researchers interviewed various teen girls about the gender double standard in terms of sexuality, and they found that many of them noted the existence of an unfair double standard that held more sexually liberal women in a bad light. Interestingly, the girls also accepted the inevitability and reality of the gender double standard, some even participating in providing negative descriptions of other girls they considered to have

unacceptable behavior (Lyons *et al.*). What this actually shows is that the gender double standard is still in existence possibly because the old stigmas and societal norms are still widely believed in. In summary, the gender double standard has barely diminished in terms of sexual interaction in modern times.

Perhaps the greatest changes in the gender double standard can be seen in the professional lives of people. However, these changes still remain to be slight, and the full removal of the double standard remains to be observed. For example, many women are still stuck in a professional rut and are not being promoted as often as men. In a recent study done in 2015, women were 15% less likely to get promoted than men (Lean In Organization). This shows the existence of the aforementioned glass ceiling even in modern times. Women are still having a hard time advancing in the corporate ladder. In fact the same study revealed that women are even underrepresented at every corporate level, with there being a decrease in the percentage of women the higher one goes (Lean In Organization). This is to say that there are actually more men than women working at every tier in a corporation, and that the higher-up positions actually have a decrease in the number of women holding them. For instance, in the manager level positions, 37% are women, while in the more powerful position of Senior Vice President; only 23% are women (Lean In Organization). The research does show that there have been improvements to the numbers since the past, but the changes are not that great. The study reveals that the old reasoning that women are simply not as ambitious as men still holds true today (Lean In Organization). As with the past, women are still holding back on asking for promotions or raises because they are not inclined to do so. This may be a sign that the social norms and stigmas are still present and affecting the gender double standard in the workplace. This leads to the changes being slow, but at the very least, they are present. This is evidenced by the claims that a report has saying that women may have to wait 98 or so years for the parity to disappear, and though there have been slight increases in salaries and jobs for women, there is still some discrimination on how many women are employed in boardrooms compared to men

(Goodley). Though it may seem strange that it will take almost a century before even the gender pay gap closes between men and women, it still shows a trend that is in favor of women. Though it may be some time until the double standard evaporates, the changes in the gender pay gap and in the number of promotions are a good indicator that equality in the workplace is slowly becoming a reality.

Unsurprisingly, the trend of only a few changes in the gender double standard continues in terms of crime. For instance, in a recent research paper done by Sonja Starr, it was found that in terms of sentence length, criminal past, conditional-on-arrest offenses, and additional pre-arrest conditions, there is a great gender gap that supports women (Starr). What this means is that, even up to today, there is a bias favoring women in the justice system. Women still get more leniencies compared to men, and this could stem from the fact that many people actually do not advocate for change in the area of crime as much as in the other aspects. This may be because the gender double standard tends to favor men, but in this case it actually favors women. This appears to be contradictory to the fight for equality on all fronts, but may be a remnant of the old ideas and views society held on men and women; the stigmas that set each gender apart. Perhaps the ideas that women should be given passes because of their supposed nature still holds true even today. In line with this, male rape is still a problem that is not being fully addressed. For instance, the National Crime Victimization Survey of America uncovered that out of 40,000 households, 38% of sexual violence incidents were against men (Rosin). This is a reverse in the trend that the gender double standard has been following. The increase is apparently because of more males reporting the incidents, but many still do not come forward because of the old stigmas. Javaid, in his 2014 paper, reiterates the same reasoning why men do not report their rape from over a decade ago. It is still out of fear of being mocked and doubted, that victims of male rape usually do not report to the police. The victims are also concerned that the police will presume that the victim is gay and that his manliness is in question because he did not defend himself (Javaid 38). While the increase in reports may be a sign of an improvement in

the gender double standard, it actually led to more discoveries. The general discovery was that males are being raped almost as much as women are, and it usually goes unnoticed because of the already made perceptions society has on male rape. One such perception is that males are usually raped by other males, yet a recent study done in October 2015 revealed that 46% of males are actually raped by female assaulters (Weiss). Additionally 89% of staff sexual misconduct in a juvenile institution is done by a female staff member (Rosin). Clearly, there have been noticeable changes in the number of reported male rape incidents, probably caused by the liberation of some gender perceptions, but majority of society is still ignorant to these facts and still believe in old stigmas and ideas. Though there have been improvements to the gender double standard in terms of crime, it is still obvious that it still exists even in our modern time.

It is now clear that the gender double standard was and is a reality for many people. In the past, the sexual or gender double standard was prominent in the three aspects of sexual interaction, professional life, and crime. It affected everyone, but mostly women. Today, the double standard remains apparent in the same three aspects. Though it has diminished over time, its ramifications and existence still affects contemporary society. Therefore, in the three aspects of sexual interaction, professional life, and crime, the sexual or gender double standard has only changed slightly over the past decade or so. This information is actually integral in understanding how the world works based on one's gender, and affects everyone from birth. Perhaps the change in the gender double standard is one that may take decades or even centuries to overcome, but perhaps that also depends on whether or not one chooses to participate in the application of the double standard's biases and beliefs. Truly, it is up to society if they want to hold others to separate standards just because they were born with differently shaped chromosomes.

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