

"If you think education is expensive, try the cost of ignorance. If you think gender equality is expensive, try the cost of gender inequality." - Carrie Shorrock

Gender inequality and stereotypes have deep historical origins, tracing back to ancient times, and the concept of male superiority endures even in the aftermath of social revolutions. Whether in the spheres of everyday life, marital relationships, or professional environments, women are frequently relegated to the position of the disadvantaged or mistreated party, subjected to discrimination and harm. Thus, the question arises: What measures can be taken to authentically realize "gender equality" in a substantive manner?

“Never misinterpret the fight for equality as the war of sexes, that you’ll never believe that a woman doesn't deserve the same right or freedom or chances that you do. I hope you'll know that, most people, above all, are not looking for special treatment. Most people don't want everything to be exactly the same for everyone. Most people just want things to be fair for everyone. I hope you'll get that, way faster than I did. And I hope that you'll never get it into your head that just because a woman deserves every opportunity you do, you have to stop holding the door open for her when you can. That you'll never think it's impossible to be equals and

behave like a gentleman at the same time.” From Fredrick Backman book, this is one of the passage that the author said to the son. This passage emphasizes the importance of recognizing gender equality as a pursuit for fairness rather than a battle between sexes. It highlights the need to challenge traditional gender roles while promoting respectful and equitable treatment for all individuals, regardless of gender.

The magnitude of harm suffered by women in society is staggering, exemplified by incidents like the Tangshan barbecue shop assault, thereby accentuating the pervasive issue of gender-based violence. In this specific instance, a woman faced a brutal assault on the street merely for resisting harassment from a man who, upon her refusal to disclose her contact information, proceeded to physically

attack her. Such occurrences are utterly inhumane, and the pursuit of gender equality should not be entangled with acts of brutality or violence. It is disconcerting that, despite residing in a society governed by the rule of law, these occurrences have witnessed a surge in frequency in recent years.

In numerous societies, conventional culture has perpetually underscored the delineation of roles between men and women. This frequently materializes as an accentuation of strength and exaggeration for men, juxtaposed with the expectation for women to personify traits of gentleness, obedience, and domestic responsibility. Within specific cultural contexts, expressions such as "girls are destined for matrimony," "a woman's virtue lies in her lack of talent," and "women should confine themselves to domestic duties, caring for children, and culinary pursuits" resound, emblematic of skewed cultural perspectives that progressively contribute to stereotypical gender roles and entrenched societal expectations, thereby impinging upon the autonomy and advancement of women.

Furthermore, numerous countries have historically harbored legal systems that propagated gender inequality. Constraints on women's voting rights, property rights, and educational access were prevalent. Specific legislation underscored the elevated status of men, relegating women to secondary roles in society. These legal frameworks heightened gender inequality, stripping women of their fundamental rights. In addition, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, the global gender pay gap is estimated at 16%, meaning that women, on average, earn 84 cents for every dollar earned by men. In the US, the gender pay gap is reported to be around 82 cents on the dollar for full-time, year-round workers, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 data. UN Women reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a surge in reports of gender-based violence, demonstrating the exacerbation of existing challenges during crises.

In tandem with these incidents, a prevailing public discourse often tends to attribute blame to the victims. For instance, in the Tangshan episode, inquiries regarding the victim's attire and the timing of her outing are posited,

necessitating contemplation and reform. What necessitates attention and transformation is not the victims themselves but the lingering feudal mindset persisting to this day. Attaining gender equality, let alone universal parity, poses a formidable challenge, and the disconcerting elements reside in human nature and the human psyche. Perpetrators should face stringent consequences as a deterrent, and justice must be dispensed to assuage public indignation. Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 1 in 3 women worldwide has experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

Despite numerous individuals expressing their perspectives and staging protests online, society's response is disconcerting. Online voices are frequently stifled, and transgressors evade the rightful consequences. The orchestrators of such incidents often receive comparatively lenient sentences, leaving much to be desired in terms of deterring future transgressions and mollifying public discontent.

In the area of education, I interviewed a female teacher in my school. Equality, to my teacher, signifies uniformity in circumstances, opportunities, and more. However, the focus, in their view, should shift towards equity, aiming to level the playing field for groups that have faced substantial disadvantages. The belief in the equal capacity of men and women to learn and develop is emphasized, with the acknowledgment that individual choices play a crucial role in realizing this potential. When facing gender inequalities, she shared her experiences which she said: "My experience with gender inequality is mostly within my family. I have two brothers, and I can clearly see how differently I am treated as a woman. My parents walk me to my car, ask me to call them when I get home after dark, and express concern for my safety when I'm out with friends. My parents don't demonstrate the same fears for my brothers when they are out and about. I know my parents' concern comes from a place of love and relates to the way the world treats women so while the treatment is unequal, it doesn't feel unfair. Unfortunately, we live in a society where women have to be more careful in public

and private spaces in order to not become victims of violence. "Recognizing the existence of gender inequality, my teacher notes subtle societal steps toward rectification. Progress is visible in women attaining positions of power, achieving parity in various industries, and obtaining justice in cases of domestic and sexual violence. While acknowledging the biological differences that cannot be ignored, the pursuit of true equality is acknowledged as an ongoing challenge. The imperfections in the system are recognized, but there is a collective effort to enhance and refine it. The perception is that gender inequality is most pronounced in the job market. Women, particularly those from minority groups, consistently face wage gaps and are often relegated to less prestigious positions. This disparity is observed across sectors such as professional sports, entertainment, politics, and business.

Another interview from the opposite sex, within the question about his view on gender equality: It's all about the opportunities that both men and women have, and that they should have an equal number of opportunities in virtually all fields. the idea that women in equalized positions should feel confident and comfortable in different areas such as . Women should not feel different and isolated. There's a stigma against periods in the West, and that extends to products designed for tending to period-related hygiene being really hard to find. Even in the United States, many men in power are making it harder for women to have access to proper medicine in both period care but also abortion and family planning. They think it is morally right to do this.

I believe achieving gender equality in one fell swoop is impossible, as it is deeply ingrained. The approach should be to start small and gradually bring about change. For instance, addressing societal views through media by advocating and supporting the creation of positive gender images, avoiding stereotypes and gender discrimination, and encouraging the media industry to responsibly report on gender issues. Promoting gender equality in the workplace is crucial, ensuring equal pay, opportunities for advancement, and flexible work arrangements to

accommodate family needs, thereby eliminating gender-based inequalities in the professional sphere.

On the other side, I also received a different viewpoint towards gender inequality. He said: “Honestly, I don't entirely agree that there's a pervasive issue of gender inequality nowadays. I think we've come a long way in promoting equal opportunities for everyone, irrespective of gender. In many sectors, both men and women have equal chances to pursue their goals and aspirations. While I won't deny that there might be isolated instances, painting the entire society with the brush of gender inequality seems a bit exaggerated.” Because men may not fully comprehend the issue from the perspective of women, they might not realize the magnitude of the problem, as it does not directly impact them. However, I believe that gender equality is something that should be advocated for and achieved.

In education, spreading the concept of gender equality through the education system, teaching students the importance of respecting and understanding gender. In less developed cities, making efforts to provide every child with sufficient educational opportunities, conducting campaigns, lectures, and training sessions to raise public awareness of gender equality. Increasing women's participation in politics is another key aspect, advocating for equal voting rights and candidate status for women in elections, ensuring a greater female voice in political decision-making.

In the legal realm, implementing stricter laws to combat gender-based violence, providing more support and resources to victims. Simultaneously, through social movements and awareness campaigns, fostering a societal attitude of zero tolerance towards gender-based violence to reduce the occurrence of such incidents. Achieving gender equality is a complex and long-term process that requires collective efforts from all sectors of society.

In conclusion, the journey toward gender equality demands the active participation of each individual. While the road ahead may be challenging and prolonged, collective efforts hold the power to gradually dismantle inequalities

and biases. Now is the time for everyone, regardless of gender, to step up and be catalysts for change. Advocate for equal opportunities, challenge stereotypes, and foster an inclusive environment. Educate yourself and others on the issues at hand. Support organizations working toward gender equality. Every small action contributes to the larger movement. Let us seize this opportunity for both women and society to make lasting strides and significant progress. It's not just a call to awareness; it's a call to action, a call for each of us to be active agents of change. Together, we can create a world where equality is not just an aspiration but a reality for all.