



GENDER BARRIERS

A Matter of Opinion...

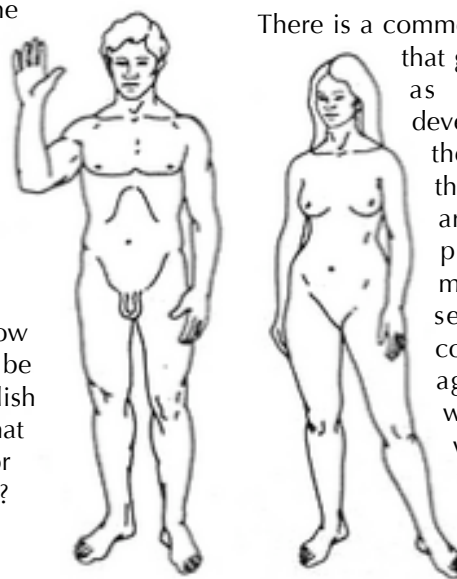
Since the beginning of time, men and women have had differing roles in society. For many centuries, the question of whether biology ought to dictate our roles, has been subject to scrutiny; we continue the debate in this issue of Fresh A.I.R.. The significance of gender and even its meaning appears to be a subjective matter, as illustrated by the articles which follow.

Do we have the right to interfere with the traditions of culture where gender plays a large role in one's social identity? Are some gender barriers inevitable due to basic biological differences? How much importance should be put on the quest to demolish gender barriers and to what extent should we strive for total equality of the sexes? These are some of the questions we have to ask when it comes to this subject.

The editorials presented in this issue represent a broad spectrum of views on the topic. Submissions came from Canada, USA, Mexico, Argentina, Sweden, Senegal, Uganda, India and New Zealand, and it is interesting to compare the gender issues

considered pertinent in each country. However, as gender roles and the perception of barriers are subject to personal interpretation; it is important to remember that the opinions expressed in this issue need not necessarily be the general position of the countries represented.

There is a common and false conception that gender barriers dissipate as a nation becomes developed. After reading all the articles, it is evident that some gender barriers are universal and remain prevalent in even the most developed and seemingly egalitarian countries. Discrimination against women in the work and economic world persists as does traditional stereotyping. Engaging in discussion and debate is the first step towards awareness and action. I hope that readers will be provoked into responding to either your countrymen (pardon the irony!) or someone across borders. Join the global dialogue on this controversial topic by expressing your opinions. (See YOUR VIEWS p. 9)



Theo Di Castri,
Editor

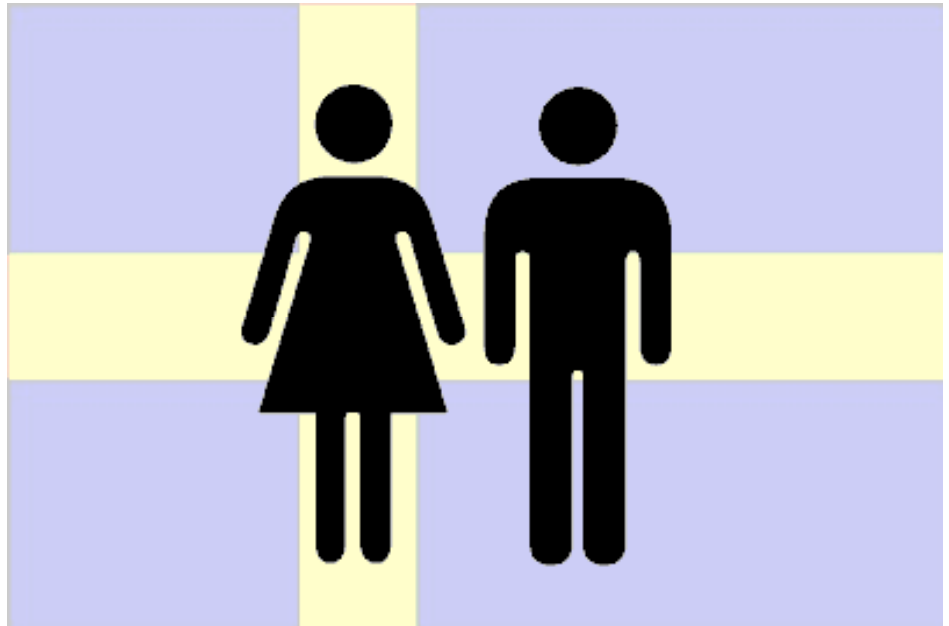
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"What are you complaining about, Sweden is an equal country"

It is hard to discuss gender issues with people from different areas of the world, because we often have different cultural views of gender. What is a woman, what is a man, how big are the biological differences, and are there things which are more suitable for men to do and other more suitable for women? Do men and women act and think differently? I will not discuss this here, but I will give you my viewpoint and it is from there I will write my article. I believe that there are biological differences between men and women, our bodies have different functions and women can give birth to babies, men cannot. Men are on an average a bit stronger than women. But the differences that come after that are the ones that our societies create.

People often tell me that I should not complain about the Swedish society, after all, it is one of the most equal societies on the earth, and they give me examples such as the fact that we have 50 percent women in the government, close to 50 in the Parliament, there are women in every possible profession and on every level within them. There is paternal leave for 11 months where the parent (who ever stays at home with the child) gets 80 percent of its current salary. There are subsidized child-care, so that women (!) do not need to stay home with the children. And we even have a princess who is going to be the monarch after the King.

All this is true. Sweden has come far when it comes to gender issues, but is it an equal country. It sure is not. Still, in the private sector, men have about 90-95% of the leading positions. Men, in



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average earn more than women. Women are the ones who stay home with newborn, and sick children the most, and therefore lose out on career opportunities. But the inequality in Sweden is mainly manifested in the ways that 'women' and 'men' are supposed to be shaped by media and culture.

Although Sweden has come far in some ways, the image that is made up of gender roles are as ancient as it can be. In Sweden, half of all eleven year old girls have been on a diet. The number of girls who have eating disorders in their younger teen years are alarming. Why is it like this? Well, because being skinny is part of being a woman. So is wearing a lot of make-up, spending a lot of time on fashion and talking about boys, have a lot of hair on the

head, but nothing on the body, being quiet, calm and patient, do as you are told, not sleep around (well, that changes when you reach the end of the teens, when its all of a sudden ok to do so)!

Don't get me wrong; I have nothing against girls who acts this way. What I am against is being put into that category, not because I want to, but because I happen to be a woman. Of course, Men are also put into gender roles, but they usually have more room in them. What I believe in, for both men and women, is having a choice of how you want to dress, act, do, love, behave, Regardless of what you have between your legs.

So yes, Sweden might have come far in the struggle of equality, but it still has a long way to go.

Sofia Lord

Gender Barriers – An Indian Perspective



Do we have the right to change or even question the long-standing tradition various cultures may have regarding the roles of women?

From the deserts of Rajasthan to the cold peaks of the Himalayas. From the poverty stricken villages to the flourishing cosmopolitan metropolises'. Living in a place as diverse as India it is really difficult to try and conceptualise such a controversial topic, especially when looking at it as a general concept. GENDER. MAN. WOMAN. Discrimination in India of the two sexes is a topic of major concern. Unfortunately discrimination of woman is still heavily at large in the villages. Most urban cities, such as Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi, have all but abolished most general gender barriers. Such barriers in the past would restrict people, mainly women, from getting jobs. In this day and age it is very difficult to think of any such restriction, however the second one leaves the glitz of the bigger cities, an immediate change is noticed. As remote the place becomes the more barriers and restrictions start to appear.

The culture of the big Indian metropolises' has started imitating that of the West. Movie theatres and shopping marts line the roads. "Money for nothing," comes stirring out of a large open area. With India becoming more and more liberal towards a large number of areas it is not surprising that women in India are gaining more equal rights. In effect it is the men, especially husbands, who are being oppressed! Still, some women feel that they are not receiving their due rights. One classic example of this is that of the "Calcutta Club". One of the most prestigious and well-known clubs in India, with membership fees running into US\$1000s and still women are not permitted to submit their applications. This is one of the most noticeable aspects of this topic. The main question here is "why?" Why are women not allowed access to this Club? The actual reason is a historical one, but there are discriminatory factors involved of course. The "Calcutta Club" was in operation since the time of the British Rule in India and since then women haven't been allowed entry. So, the

official reason given by the Club is that because of respect to tradition women will never be allowed into the clubs.

However, this is the only instance I can think of where women are so obviously discriminated against. In other cases women are given all equal rights as in any other country. It is in the smaller more rural villages that the real gender barriers emerge. The irony is they aren't really gender barriers. They are simply long standing traditions, similar to those of the "Calcutta Club," that are not going to change. Simply saying that they should change is also not a fair statement. Each village in India has its own culture, tradition and customs. The gender barriers in these villages are there for a reason and generally the reasons aren't bad. In the village the men are *expected* to go out and harvest the crop and take the finished product to sell, while the women are *expected* to work at home and do the chores of the house. Who's to say that this isn't a good system? It is something that I believe works, at least in a rural setting. If such distinctions weren't established then perhaps the entire hierarchal structure would collapse. Although true that women in India are still oppressed, these are far and few. A lot of barriers exists disabling women from entering certain careers but these are only in the rural areas and that too for only certain professions. Tradition is the main cause of this phenomenon. Do we have the right to change or even question the long standing tradition various cultures may have regarding the roles of women?

If I were to go looking for a job in most cities in India, the FIRST thing they would jump to would be my grades. A standard process in India: qualifications are everything. Whether you're black, white, blue, green, male, female young or old the numbers are all they look at when deciding between you and them. The Indian

Institute of Technology is *the* most prestigious and well-received colleges in India. Extremely difficult to get into, this college boasts an equal distribution of guys and girls. So, where are all these stereotypes surfacing from? A big factor is the media; Indian movies are still being made where the female actresses are shown as being helpless damsels waiting for their Prince charming to save them. Bollywood has failed to show men and women equally and India as a whole is suffering for that mistake. A gradual change in such stereotypes is taking place, but these are only happening in the big cities. Where they are most required, the villages, nothing is happening at all.

The young generation in India is one of the most dynamic and enterprising groups of people. By the time the next generation is able to take hold, I'm sure all barriers would come down in at least the bigger metropolises. It is the little villages that will not change. But perhaps not changing these villages will retain their cultural heritage. It is not for only us decide!

Abhiroop Basu

Gender Barriers in Argentina

I believe "Gender barriers" is a popular topic nowadays, especially because of the feminist movement that has grown greatly during the last decades. However this topic has never taken an important part in the Argentina society.

I think Argentina has not many and important gender barriers. Most of them are in the working world. You can see women or men doing practically the same jobs. However I have never seen a fire-women a women machinist working in a petrol station...or a man working as a secretary, a man teaching in a kinder garden.... I believe a man and a woman has biological differences that make them capable for specific jobs. But I also believe those differences are not an impediment for doing what one desires.

"I have never seen a fire-woman, a woman machinist working in a petrol station...or a man working as a secretary, a man teaching in kindergarten"

Moreover, it is crucial to mention that many, maybe most of the companies prefer men when choosing their humans resources. One of the reasons is that women need to take long working holidays for pregnancy and they end up not being effective for the company.

There are movements to help and reinforce women rights in the labor world. But in my opinion the biggest impact is done by writer, artist, singers that actually show the existing and hidden inequality. For that reason I would simply end by saying that education is for me the most important tool to demolish gender barriers in my country. It is education what helps to comprehend the other and brings understanding between both genders.

María Laura Sánchez



Gender Barriers – A Kiwi perspective

The typical New Zealander (kiwi) would tell you that in New Zealand there is no gender discrimination. They would say, 'we were the 1st country in the world to give women the vote, we have a woman prime minister, obviously we don't have it'. By comparison to a lot of countries kiwi women and men are treated, on the whole, equally. However, contrary to the thoughts of the average kiwi, gender discrimination is present in New Zealand. It may be hidden and small but it is still here. As silly as it may sound, in the modern era men and women are discriminated against equally. In some circles men are discriminated against, in others, women. Although the discrimination is small it still exists.

In NZ if people are discriminated against there is a large possibility that they don't know about it. I remember a friend of mine saying regarding job interviews he was conducting, "... yeah mate, she was good, had all the qualifications, was perfect for the job. But man you know those late 20s chicks, they'll want to settle down, have kids and then be worthless to us. Need leave, 6 months for each kid - not worth the hassle! Might as well get a fella, they're more reliable and will stick around. No messing around with them". This is gender discrimination at its worst. This type of discrimination, although unspoken, is present through many jobs in all levels of society. It is the probable reason why men have more highly ranked jobs and are paid slightly more than women in the work place. In the example above it is impossible for the woman in the interview to get a fair deal. No matter what she would have said she would be stereotyped and discriminated against. Despite having laws against this type of discrimination it still occurs, however the laws have reduced its incidence.

A lot of the time the gender discrimination is obvious but the people don't particularly care or have been conditioned not to care. Take a typical nightclub. "Guy looks at girl, guy approaches girl, guy talks to girl, guy touches girl on shoulder". If reported, a sexual

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harassment claim could result. Although this appears to be a big deal (sexual harassment claim), NZ men know that touching of any sort shouldn't happen. Because of this unwritten rule touching (when 1st meeting a woman) doesn't occur and NZ men know and accept that this can't occur. Now if we change the shoes. 'Girl looks at guy, girl approaches guy, girl talks to guy, girl touches guy on shoulder'. There are no questions asked and no sexual harassment claims. Therefore for the same nightclub, same girl, same guy, same events, there is a different outcome. Obviously there is a double standard here. However, due to the values of NZ society the kiwi male accepts that touching a girl (when 1st approached) in any way shape or form not acceptable behavior and can't be done but that the reverse situation is acceptable. As shown from this example different rules apply to males and females on different occasions. Sometimes people see it, sometimes they don't. A lot of the time it is an accepted part of society and because of this no questions are asked. At present, the discrimination is not large enough or life crippling enough to 'kick up a fuss' and people would rather fight for other things than worry about gender issues.

As some gender discrimination is engrained into the culture (as described above), people in NZ aren't aware of it. Gender discrimination only becomes an issue when it goes outside what is socially acceptable. As earlier stated, my mate discriminated against a woman when hiring for a position. Had he not been cautious about who he told there would have been a big issue and he may have lost his job. This type of discrimination is unacceptable and falls outside what is socially acceptable. Both males and females are aware that this type of discrimination occurs but seem to be of the impression that it only happens to 'other people'. For this reason people in NZ are probably not aware that gender discrimination is occurring to them.

Gender in NZ will usually not determine what opportunities you have. In the working world women may be limited as people are reluctant to employ women in some managerial type positions. In terms of access to university, scholarships, food, water, shelter, money etc - women and men are on an equal footing. For this reason there are no major movements to abolish the gender barriers that do exist in NZ. Of course, like in any issue you will find extremists who never believe that they have a fair deal (I speak of feminists and male chauvinists). But these people are few and far between. Being male I believe there are more feminists around than male chauvinists. However this is biased as I guess a person only has a problem with something if it directly affects them. An

example of this discrimination was when I attempted to rent a house. Being a 20y/o university student (at the time) the lady looked at me and said 'I don't think you're appropriate for this type of property'. When asked why she said 'I'm looking for older people, people that wish to settle down'. My female friend decided to approach the lady. She was a 19y/o university student. The woman showed my friend around the house and decided that my friend was perfect for the house. In this situation I believe that this was a form of gender discrimination. The woman had preconceived notions about the trustworthiness of a male and therefore discriminated against me by not renting me the house. I didn't really care too much as we still got to rent the house but it does show that the gender discrimination was relevant to me. For this reason I am more likely to take note of the discrimination as the discrimination happened directly to me more than I would to a female (that would only affect me 2nd hand) and therefore think there are more feminists than male chauvinists. This is a one off example and shows (although small) the existence of gender discrimination.

In NZ if you are born female your life is not any worse or better than if born male. Although gender inequality exists in some facets of society it is not a major enough issue for people. In every country there will be people that will discriminate, as is evident in NZ. People in NZ generally accept the gender inequalities that occur and usually this does not affect their life enough to warrant a change in behavior. So will things change in NZ- I don't think so. But does it need to change? As society accepts the boundaries as a whole, I don't think many people feel it needs to change. As a whole gender discrimination is equal and I think the people of NZ accept this.

Peter W. Stubbs

Gender Barriers in Senegal

Gender barriers are one of the key problems in Senegal, as in most Sub-Saharan countries, consequence of a very special background. The Senegalese population is at 90% Muslim, but still deeply rooted in the traditional values inherited from the previous generations. However, the issue is that current generations use the religion combined to these cultural values to justify gender discrimination, which is definitely pointless.

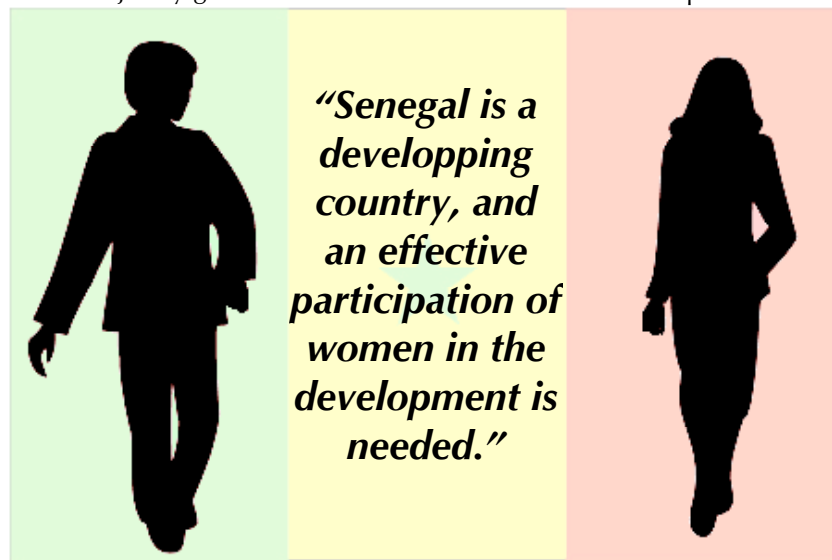
Not so long ago, women having a professional occupation in Senegal were highly criticized. The agreement was that a woman's place was at home, to take care of the children and serve the husband. This mentality still exists but people are starting to realize that women must have the same rights as men. Senegal is a

developing country, and an effective participation of women in the development is needed. In fact, for every 100 men in Sub-Saharan Africa there are 102 women compared to 98,6 women for every 100 men world-wide (United Nations, 1995). Therefore, a further involvement of women is definitely necessary to improve the living standards.

Nevertheless, a significant number of factors intervene against gender equality in Senegal. Firstly, poverty is one of the main barriers to gender equality. For instance, when a family can not afford to send all its children at school, because families tend to be large in Senegal, boys are prioritized and girls stay at home. This creates a lack of equal access to education which

constitutes the starting point for any form of development. Secondly, the other important problem is with women themselves. Many of them genuinely believe that it is normal for them to have this particular place in the Senegalese society. Their argument is that there must be in any case people to fulfill those domestic tasks ; but why do more equal societies manage then?

I believe that the gender barriers problem in Senegal is not going to be solved in a short time period because mentalities established centuries before with the traditional society need to be changed. However, many local organisations lead by women are trying to sensitize the population and, hopefully, things will progressively improve.



Mame Coumba Mbodji,

Ugandan Gender Barriers

Uganda's culture is strongly based on the beliefs and values laid down years ago, by our ancestors in the African Traditional society. In this society, gender had a special role to play in the running of the society. As such, every member of society knew exactly what society expected of him/ her. A girl child had special roles to play in the day to day running of the society and had a role to play in the survival of the family and entire society, the same applied to boys, men and the older members of society. For this reason, there were minimal instances when people felt obscured by their gender identities from playing a role in the running of society.

However, with the coming of education, and job classification, those that were unable to acquire such jobs felt less important in society. They felt that their role in the survival of society was demeaned. It's for that reason that more opportunity was given to the male child while the girls were denied a chance to go to school and thus, denied access to well-paying jobs. This gave the men in society a dominant role, while the women became living incubators, viewed only as sources of pleasure to the 'hard-working' men. In the centuries that followed after this, it was necessary that children were sent to school, but girls were not viewed as being capable of putting formal education

to use, for they were very vulnerable and many of them were not able to finish the minimum school requirements before their 'community duties' of marriage and motherhood called. Those who chose to stick in school until they finished their degrees risked becoming 'too old' or 'too sophisticated' to be married.

In fact, these limitations were only based on the insecurity that exists within all men, that marrying a more educated woman would be a blow to his ego, and social status. This hasn't changed much in the recent years...men in Uganda do not take women that are more educated than they are, or women that are more gainfully employed than them. This is basically a tool of control that husbands use to keep their wives under their grip. There's always the looming fear of losing your marriage through misunderstandings in the family based on differing perceptions. It's probably for the same reason that Uganda (like many African countries) hasn't had a chance to be under the control of a female president.

In the same vein, the media council of Uganda recently declared the play 'The Vagina Monologues' as "obscene, disgusting, immoral and an attempt by the international

community of feminist extremists to corrupt the Ugandan culture. It is vulgar and above all a western elitist thing." The minister in charge of Ethics and Integrity had that to say about the play. This move was taken as an attempt to 'protect the strong Ugandan culture' from being corrupted by western values and ideas. However, the public views this move as another one of society's numerous attempts to sideline women in this country. It is true that Ugandan culture needs to be protected, and that no savior is going to step forward and do this for us. However, if the culture has to be put before the rights of those that it stands for, it doesn't make sense. In Northern Uganda for instance, there was a practice of circumcising women, to 'initiate them into the society.' This involved mutilation of their genitalia, which was considered a proper cultural practice, but which actually was aimed at minimizing the pleasure women derive from sexual intercourse. This was massively criticized when the



society finally opened its eyes to the plight of these women and was declared illegal. The ban that was placed on Vagina monologues is seen as a greater degree of oppression of women and since it is being affected by the highest body in Uganda--the government, no one can stand to oppose it.

Also, it's important to note that gender differences are

emphasized by some religions in

"Gender barriers in Uganda are embedded in our culture..."

Uganda. For instance, in the Catholic church, although it's not uncommon to find female church elders, it's absolutely out of the question for women to be priests and bishops. In view of the same, women feel a bit left out and stuck with less important roles to play in the church, such as running Sunday school classes, and being choir leaders compared to their male counterparts who have so many alternative roles to play. The church therefore, which should be an agent of change and an advocate for equality, seems to support oppression of women.

This is however amidst endless debates about the same, but the church, slow as it is in making decisions, is still clinging on to the olden tradition. One can only be hopeful in Uganda's case that the entire nation will open their eyes and kick out all traditions that in any way deter development because they demean the place of women in the community. One big achievement that must be pointed out though, is that Ugandans are following the piece of advice that Socrates dished out, that "the best way to get over your problems is to confront them" by realizing, at least some of them, that there's a problem and making an attempt to rectify it.

Sylvia Gift Nabukeera

Gender Barriers: A Matter of Culture

Mexico has always had trouble with gender barriers. Let's face it, Mexican society is far from gender equality and there is much to do, culturally speaking, in order to improve this situation. Mexican women have been fighting against gender inequality for a long time. Nonetheless, it was not until October 17th of 1953 when a Constitutional amendment granted women the right of voting. Nowadays, there are no many legal gender barriers left. This is, legally, any kind of gender inequality is forbidden. Yet, culturally, nothing has changed for most Mexican women. Gender barriers are mainly based on culture and traditional beliefs, thus discrimination arising from them occurs within fields that can hardly be legally prosecuted. Furthermore, the way in which women suffer discrimination, most of the times, depends on their social status. This brings us to the greatest difficulty that arises when it comes to talking about anything about Mexican society: social inequality.

Of course, in most of the fanciest neighborhoods and corporate buildings in Mexico City or Monterrey abound

successful women executives, CEOs, entrepreneurs –who might look as the best example of how gender barriers have been surpassed in the past years–. Just to mention one example of such women, María Asunción Aramburuzabala is the richest women in Mexico and was ranked 78th by *Forbes Magazine* in a list of the most powerful women in the world. Has she ever

suffered gender discrimination? Even women like her might have suffered gender discrimination at the slightest level, the cultural: maybe a derogatory comment by a business partner or enterpriser; maybe someone's scorn at her while studying at college. Any of these are offences that should not be unobserved and yet that are not comparable with the discrimination so frequently undergone by indigenous women or women belonging to the lowest or middle classes.

The fact that gender barriers and discrimination especially affect the lowest social levels illustrates two of the most relevant causes for these gender barriers. Firstly, that a big part of the problem lays on social inequality and not on gender barriers themselves as part of the social structure. Secondly, that –consequently– there must be cultural roots behind gender barriers that make them worst in particular social circumstances. The origin of gender inequality –according to the National Institute for Women– is the wrong interpretation that society makes of the biological differences between men and women. These differences enhanced in the past beliefs that made women

–who were not as physically strong as men and thus not equally apt for rural work– less valuable. Consequently, these beliefs became tradition, and the tradition was inherited to the new generations and manifested in many different activities. In the same way women were not apt for work in fields, they were dismissed as incompetent when it came to academic activities or industry.

At the present time, in the working world, gender barriers are product of the tradition that imposed women a secondary role and the –commonly accepted and rarely acknowledge–prejudice of women slight inferiority. Likewise, many enterprises avoid employing women in order to evade having to afford expenses arising from pregnancy. Nevertheless, since 1974, many changes have been made in Mexican laws preventing gender discrimination in working places and in order to improve gender equality. Finally, in 2001 the Law for the National Institute of Women was decreed and an autonomous

organization –in charge of combating gender barriers and protecting women affected by any kind of abuse or discrimination– was created. As a result, many of the former barriers are being eradicated, especially those that represented an explicit violation to the women Constitutional rights.

All the same, the gender discrimination is inherent to culture and to

the traditional slender disdain with which many people in society regards women. A few days ago, I asked one of my schoolmates whether she felt there was tangible gender discrimination around us. Then, she told me of the many times she had been verbally offended by other teens or men, while walking down the street, and even by other women that found it fun. It was not anything serious, indeed, nonetheless it showed the little respect with which many people regard women. Furthermore, that reminded me of the sports class at elementary school and how offensive it was to any boy to be defeated by a girl. Most of the childish mocking at the time was based on gender discrimination and most of the name-calling referred, in an apparent innocent manner, to a given women inferiority. Eventually, it is in culture where the roots of gender inequality remain untouched. Consequently, if our generation is looking forward to eradicating the gender barriers that still affect our society we must start changing our culture and way of thinking towards women. There are

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already organizations and institutions that defend women rights against institutional or legal abuses; nevertheless, there are no institutions capable of preventing abuses and discrimination arising from culture and its common and spontaneous manifestations in several aspects of the daily life. Gender barriers lay not only on flamboyant violations against the women's rights, but on the unnoticed disdain, the hidden scorn and the secretly accepted belief that –no matter to what extent– women are inferior to men. If our generation desires to bring a future of gender equality in this country, we must start fighting these erroneous beliefs by respecting each other and regarding gender equality as a reality beyond any laws or institutions that support it.

Esteban Ramirez

Statistically speaking

- Women represent a large proportion of international migrants – an estimated 56 million women out of a total of 118 million migrants.
- Women now account for almost half of all cases of HIV/AIDS and in countries with high HIV prevalence, young women are at higher risk than young men of contracting HIV.
- Two thirds of the world's 876 million illiterates are women, and the number of illiterates is not expected to decrease significantly in the next twenty years.
- Women remain at the lower end of a segregated labour market and continue to be concentrated in a few occupations, to hold positions of little or no authority and to receive less pay than men.
- Physical and sexual abuse affects millions of girls and women worldwide yet are known to be seriously under-reported.
- In some African countries, more than half of all women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation and its prevalence is not declining.
- Women and girls comprise half of the world's refugees and, as refugees, are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence while in flight, in refugee camps and/or during resettlement.
- Despite calls for gender equality, women are significantly under-represented in Governments, political parties and at the United Nations.

Source: *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics* United Nations Statistics Division



YOUR VIEWS

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Your voice counts, so why not let the world hear it? Help the Fresh A.I.R. initiative by participating in the discussion. Please send in any comments and letters regarding the views presented in this issue or simply stating what you believe. A selection of the responses will be published in the next issue and posted on the new web site. (www.freshair-online.com)

Please send all submissions to:
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Gender in America

Gender, what the hell does that mean? I honestly have no clue. Here, in my America, gender is male. English has no neuter gender. In cases of ambiguity, it defaults to the masculine. American society has followed suit. Becoming a man, in the company of men, one has no knowledge that there is any other. If you are so unfortunate as to be born straight xx's, the best that you can hope for is androgyny.

Socially, the function of the woman is to complement the man. Women have a strictly defined role, and it is filled with sugar, spice, and everything nice. Men are pigs; it's their birthright. I always found it funny, that in the traditional notion, the wife stays at home, taking care of the children and cooking; and yet somehow, the man achieved the status of "breadwinner." He may bring home the bacon, but most guys I know would starve if they had to eat their own cooking. So if I came here to right the wrongs of stereotypes, why dwell on them? This is life, as I have known it throughout my upbringing. Of course, my very involvement with such a journal as this suggests that not all is as it used to be. In fact, rather than the isolationists we once were, Americans now are viewed as the biggest imperial dogs of the day. This has also brought about a change in the way gender roles are treated within our society. As men went off to conquer the world, the women stepped up and ran things in their absence.

During WWII (the lazy way of writing World War Two) the government sponsored an ad campaign featuring Rosie the Riveter, which can still be found abundantly today. In it, a very powerful looking woman brandishes a riveter and says 'We can do it!'. Brilliant eh? Regardless, even with the majority of our youthful male workforce out saving the world from the evils of fascism and the like, we were still able to produce more crap than anybody could blow up. For the British, a Liberty Ship could be built in just under a year. We did it in less than a day. And since I mentioned production...it's time for an economics lesson. US gross national product (GDP) has risen throughout the twentieth century and recent years at about three percent a year. Granted, there were discrepancies, but for the most part, three percent. Throughout this, US population has grown about one and a half percent a year, significantly less than three. (and mostly due to immigration, I might add) So how does production growth outstrip population by double? The first, most obvious answer, is technology. And yes; but only to a certain extent. Now here, here is where we tie this back to gender issues.

The workplace is one of the key areas in which the women's liberationist type people feel that they have made the most progress. Today, women occupy every level of the corporate world. They are even prevalent in most levels of politics. That said, it's still a man's world. A woman must either wear a skirt/dress (for which the men are grateful, and usually unapologetic in their misogyny) or a suit (in which they look like a man). In most cases, women are not paid equally to their male counterparts. Often, they are passed over for the top jobs, and generally treated as less than peers. This is getting far longer than I intended. I hope you get some idea as to where we stand. The stereotype fits in many cases. Great advances have been made to fix that though. Regardless, "All MEN are created equal." Women, need not apply.



Gender Issues in Canada: Still Not Enough

When I think about the state of gender equality in Canada, I think about a lot of things. I think about the fact that I am scared to walk home after dark, simply because of my gender. I think about the fact that women still are only making 76 cents to every dollar that men make in our supposedly advanced society. I think about the constant gender stereotyping throughout society that impedes the freedom of expression of men and women. I think about my good friend, a butch lesbian, who was burned in the face with a cigarette last month by a man on the street who took offence to her gayness. I think about how Engineering is the faculty at my university with the highest-paying jobs available upon graduating, and how this is the faculty with the least amount of women in it. I think of women's unpaid work in the home.

In Canada, a nation that is typically considered first world, we have a tendency to think that we have achieved gender equality. Feminism is about the 'Famous Five' five women who were leaders of the fight to win the vote for women in 1918. We think about the second wave of

feminism in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, which institutionalized gender equality in such efforts as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (a document guaranteeing gender equality), rape crisis centres across the country, and Status of Women Canada, a government body that was established to work on women's issues across the country. These triumphs, however, are not the whole story of feminism in Canada. Since the 1980s, fiscally conservative governments have been cutting back on public services that are crucial for women's ability to survive in the world. One example is health care: when hospitals have to send their patients home because of a lack of resources to care for them, it is often women who are forced to care for their loved ones at home. The gains made by the second wave of feminism have been largely erased by

this fiscal conservatism, known as neoliberalism. New governments have shown little or no interest in furthering the cause of feminism, and where in the early 80s the Prime Ministerial election forums would include a debate solely on gender issues; these, however, were ignored in the 2004 elections.

This is not the only history of women's issues in Canada, however. One example is the story of women gaining the right to vote: we know this date popularly to be in 1918, but this did not apply to Aboriginal women, who were not allowed to vote without revoking their Indian status until 1960. Homeless women were not permitted to vote until the 2000 election. Another key issue in Canadian feminism today is the case of Aboriginal women,

specifically, the large numbers of Aboriginal women who disappeared from the streets of Western Canadian cities while working as prostitutes. In Vancouver, it took ten years of pressure from the families and friends of the victims before the police



Statue of the Famous Five and the journal tablet in commemoration of the 'Persons' Case

"In Canada, a nation that is typically considered first world, we have a tendency to think that we have achieved gender equality."

I live, ten women have gone missing from our streets while working as prostitutes in the past fifteen years, four of them going missing in the past two years. There has been very little police action; prompting the international human rights organization Amnesty International to release a report entitled *Stolen Sisters*, condemning Canadian government inaction on the cases. We like to think that because we live in Canada, we're doing well for gender issues. Well, that is most definitely not the case, and we have a long way to go before we see equality.

Meagan Johnston

