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# Harmful Gender Stereotypes

by Ellie Conboy

Gender stereotypes can be harmful to people, but that doesn't mean stereotypes don't have a role in society. For example: if someone tells or makes a girl wear a dress, then it can be mentally or even physically harmful to her. But, if she wears one because she wants to, then it might make her happy, so stereotypes can do seemingly contradictory things: help with acceptance or create a difference.

Many people think there are only two genders, but society has changed and now there are too many genders to count – but that's a good thing. It means people feel like they can finally express themselves. Considering Michael Dillon who lived from 1915 to 1962 was the first person to transition from female to male through hormones and surgery, it feels like it's been too long of a struggle.

Historically, people have been forced to pick one of these two stereotypical gender blankets. Yet, this struggle has been going on much longer than others may think. People have found Sumerian and Akkadian texts from 4,500 years ago documenting priests known as gala, who may have been transgender. Also in Ancient Greece, Phrygia, and Rome, there were Galli priests that some scholars believe to have been trans women. This shows that transgender people are just a part of human nature. It also makes me wonder how there are so many transphobic people if there have been transgender people for so long.

Each gender has its assigned roles and responsibilities and those roles are changing. Instead of women cooking, cleaning, and being stay-at-home moms, they're working and the men are taking up these roles in the household. This change has been happening for a while now but compared to the 1950s it's a big difference. This is a good example of society remaking social norms, resulting in some people following and some rebelling, but those who rebel are sometimes looked down upon by others. Before the 2000s if someone saw a dad holding a baby in public people would have asked "are you babysitting" yet now it's less of a "where's mom" thing and others may be "applauding them silently," as Judith Lorber talks about in *Night to His Day*.

Another point that Judith Lorber makes is that "everyone 'does gender without thinking about it.'" Women are expected to dress more femininely, be polite, and nurturing. Men are expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold. This is how we generally view these genders and determine what gender others are. When people change genders, they also use society's idea of gender because gender expression is the stereotypes we put on those genders. This is how we "do gender," and we do this to babies too.

Babies don't look different. They all have chubby round bodies and if it's wearing a diaper it may be impossible to tell if it's a girl or a boy. So we rely on what the baby is wearing, if it's pink or has flowers on it, it's considered girly and we think of it as a boy if it's wearing blue, sharks, or dinosaurs. But what happens when it's wearing both boyish and girly clothes or they're all white or gray? We ask what their sex is, but why do strangers need or want to know? Why is this a thing? Because it just is, that's how society has been, it's just become a natural thing. Yet we still don't need to know.

We have gender because we like to put people into categories. People use gender for sameness, yet society uses it as a difference. But gender shouldn't be such a big deal. It should be less of something others have to label and just something that's there for the people themselves. I think that people should be able to be whatever they want, gender-wise, without being judged by others. We also need to make all genders feel equal and not have males be the power gender. People can have gender reveal parties and still have society's male and female stereotypes, but we shouldn't live in a world where people have to do these things or where people make others feel bad when they do things differently or not at all.