

Does gender matter?

Phoebe, Whitmore High School, Year 10 - WINNER

In a modern, social context, what is the significance of gender? To discuss the idea of gender mattering in a social context, the differences between sex and gender must be expressed. Sex and gender, when used broadly, can overlap, especially when defining the gender identity of a cisgender person. However, the term gender refers to an internal, social, and sometimes cultural perception of oneself, whereas sex refers to the biological aspects of oneself like reproductive organs. In this essay, I am going to convey my views on whether or not gender matters in a social context and how gender matters to an individual.

In modern and past societies, there can be discrepancies in the manner one is raised depending on their assigned sex at birth. When discussing this, it is important to be aware that some people are raised according to the gender that correlates with their assigned sex at birth, not their gender identity. It is also notable that in modern society some parents choose to raise their children as non-binary, however, I am going to focus on how gender shapes the way people, using the example of those raised as male and female, are disciplined.

When looking at how gender affects the manner one is disciplined throughout childhood, it is common (for someone assigned female at birth), to hear the phrase “boys will be boys” when hurt by their male peers, (or those assigned male at birth). Ostensibly, this is an enabling figure of speech which correlates masculinity with violence which excuses the behaviour of those who are assigned male at birth. Notably, this phrase is heard after a young boy hurts someone thus linking the negative action to being a boy and masculinity as a whole. Clearly, the use of the phrase can also express an unwillingness to discipline a young boy, and it suggests that the unwillingness comes solely from the gender of the child. Gender, or more so the response of adults based on the gender of the child being disciplined, matters because figures of speech used when disciplinary action should occur are often enabling when centred around young boys, which leads them to think their behaviour is acceptable due to it being linked to their gender.

Additionally, it could be argued that when someone assigned female at birth is disciplined it is more common for them to hear phrases that link their bad behaviour with a lack of femininity such as: “It’s not ladylike”. Importantly, this figure of speech presents a rather narrow and archaic view of the definition of femininity, which could also have classist undertones. Interestingly, “Ladylike” alludes to the behaviour of an upper-class woman which insinuates that the behaviour of middle and working-class women is undesirable and morally depraved. This could also establish that in the eyes of society, bad behaviour is unfeminine, or even masculine, which could reflect how people who are assigned female at birth are held to higher standards than people who are assigned male at birth. Evidently, the gender of someone who is assigned female at birth is weaponized against them when they are disciplined. Thus it can be argued that gender matters when affecting the manner one is

disciplined. Indeed, the significance of this is that it perhaps shapes the behaviours of adults depending on the gender they were raised as. The figures of speech used during discipline connote masculinity to bad behaviour and unaccountability, whilst also linking femininity to archaic ideals and the upper classes.

Whilst it is clear that gender matters in a social context, gender can also matter to an individual. Despite much controversy in the United States of America, gender-affirming healthcare could exemplify the significance of gender to an individual. Arguably, if gender didn't matter to an individual, transgender individuals would feel no desire or need to transition. However, the existence of gender-affirming healthcare is a response to gender dysphoria in which a transgender individual experiences mild to severe discomfort due to their physical appearance or social acclimatisation. Gender is incredibly important to an individual due to the way it shapes a person's presence in society and physical appearance.

To conclude, I would argue that gender does matter to an individual and in a social context. Gender impacts how one is raised and how one feels comfortable with oneself, which can affect a person's happiness. However, I would argue that gender shouldn't matter due to gender discrimination and toxic masculinity existing as a result of gender.



Reproduction Prohibited