

Qualified, Capable, and Held Back

The idea of gender—not experience, initiative, work-ethic—but *gender* preventing qualified individuals from pursuing ambitious goals is incredulous. In the international school I was raised in, success basically came hand-in-hand with merit and hard work—as it should be. Ambitious girls took advanced math courses, led entrepreneurial clubs, and participated in scientific research because *they wanted to*—sometimes in greater numbers than boys.

Yet, the disappointing truth is that in Japan, most young women aren't as fortunate. Though Japan is one of the most developed nations globally, its belief regarding the role of women remains terribly obsolete: it continues to view women merely as domestic workers who care for children. Each year, this culturally ingrained ideology discourages—sometimes even prevents—intelligent, aspiring women from pursuing their dreams.

In 2018, 9 medical schools in Japan, including Tokyo Medical University (TMU)—one of the top schools in the region—were found guilty of manipulating application scores to reduce the number of female acceptances. Yomiuri Shimbun, one of the five national newspapers in Japan, quoted an anonymous source from TMU who stated: "there was a 'silent understanding' to reduce the number of female entrants over concerns female graduates were not going on to practice medicine in employment [due to childcare]."

Imagine that you are one of the smart young women denied acceptance because you *might* have children one day and *might* quit your job to care for children and *might* abandon your passions. Would you be mad? Of course you would be—you were passionate, driven, and motivated, and yet the tables were turned against you simply because of your gender.

It's not just medicine where women face the glass ceiling. Women across departments struggle to find full-time jobs, especially those of higher positions, compared to men. According to Nikkei Asia, women hold less than 8%—*a single-digit value*—of management positions. Instead, more than half (55%) of working women are in "irregular" positions (non-stable jobs), compared to 23% of male workers; the reason why is because Japanese society still thinks that Women will have children and that women should stay home to care for them. The idea of independent women not wanting to marry or have children is rarely even considered.

The problem with this stereotype towards women is it *reinforces* the outdated belief that the sole duty of women is parenting and domestic duties—while men work. In the ideal case, there should be no concrete separation of parental roles; both parents should designate time to childcare for the child's wellbeing. According to the Pediatric Association of Franklin, father figures are just as important as mother figures, and an "involved Father promotes inner growth and strength" of children. Not only that, loving fathers set vital examples towards young girls of what positive, healthy relationships with men look like, which also helps girls identify whether they're fairly treated as they mature.

The importance of father figures is evident. Yet, Japanese society sticks with its stereotype of women and careers, pushing childcare to one parent and forcing women to face the dilemma of choosing between child care and work. Japanese fathers need to increase their role in childcare for both the child and mother.

Additionally, the "women equals home" stereotype is so reinforced that, many times, women who continue their jobs even after childbirth are looked down on for choosing work over domestic duties. A study conducted by medical professors at Kyoto, Nagoya, and Jogakuen University revealed that female doctors who prioritized housework but continued their jobs were looked down upon as "extravagant." The study also reveals that many women don't want to burden colleagues for doing more work during maternity leave or working fewer shifts to care for young children—which doesn't fit the independent, subservient, and hardworking expectations of Japanese society workers—showing how deeply reinforced the gender stereotypes are in the minds of Japanese women, preventing them from achieving career goals.

What we need *now* is the change of the system—the system that categorizes women as domestic workers and places men as *the* responsible figure for providing income to the family. Given a chance for women to ascend into professional positions, they will take it, and they will shine. However, unless Japan breaks its gender stereotypes, well-qualified women will continue to face the glass wall during employment. Unless Japan progresses from its obsolete views, ambitious women will have to continue to choose between childcare or their career passions. Unless we fight for change, the fallacious stereotype will persist, locking society's young girls into a future of lost opportunity.