

The Real Deal about Women in the 21st Century

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In 2008, the United States of America had a woman who ran a successful bid for the highest position in the land. And yes, while Senator Hillary Clinton did not win, she ran one of the toughest campaigns in the history of this nation.

Women and men of the current era often feel that the struggle for gender equality is not a number one priority on the social agenda any longer, as it was 40 or 50 years ago because women are better off today. They often forget that their mothers and grandmothers were the ones who bore the brunt of an era where women were treated unequally and unfairly. It was the voices of our mothers and grandmothers that influenced the opportunities that women today enjoy. Women have come a long way, but they have not yet arrived. Let me present to you some of the greatest social challenges faced by women in the twenty-first century.

1. Women are overworked - Women all over the world are overworked, underpaid and unrecognized. While women produce 75 to 90 percent of food crops in the world, they are also responsible for the running of households. According to the United Nations, in no country in the world do men come anywhere close to women in the amount of time spent doing housework. Women in the wealthiest Western countries also suffer disproportionately; they are the ones who carry the heaviest work load when it comes to children, housework, and general care and management of family affairs.

2. Women are poorer- Sociologists often refer to this phenomenon as the “feminization of poverty,” where two out of every three poor adults, the world over, are women. The majority of the 1.5 billion people surviving on 1 dollar a day or less are women. In current times, the divide between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty is not being reversed, as many have proclaimed, in fact it has continued to widen in the past decade. Worldwide, women earn on average slightly more than 50 per cent of what men earn. The dreadful consequences of women living in poverty is that they are often denied access to critical resources such as proper health care, credit, land and inheritance.

3. Women are not portrayed fairly and accurately in the media- While we must agree that women have made considerable strides in the media industry- there is definitely more representation than what we had 20 years ago. Women are still boxed into certain roles on television and film –‘The Drama Queen’, ‘The Supermom’, ‘The Sex Kitten’, ‘The Desperate Housewife’. We are also primarily bombarded by images of women and girls who are unnaturally thin with faces way too made up. The exclusion of women by race is also a detected phenomenon. For example, in the USA, missing or abducted women and girls of certain physical features, particularly white and blonde, receive more media attention and coverage than African, Asian, and Latina women. As a result, the cases of women with more media attention are solved in less time. Also, the role of women, as the *cover girl* image, often presented in the media, sends the message that a pretty face is worth more than intelligence, skill and expertise. This happens in all nations, from the wealthiest to the poorest.

4. Women work harder and are “still” paid less - Women do two-thirds of the world's work, receive 10 percent of the world's income and own 1 percent of the means of production. Richard H. Robbins, in his book ‘Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism’, p. 354, writes: “According to Inter Press Service, “On a global scale, women cultivate more than half of all the food that is grown. In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, they produce up to 80 percent of basic foodstuffs. In Asia, they account for around 50 percent of food production. In Latin America, they are mainly engaged in subsistence farming, horticulture, poultry and raising small livestock.” Yet these women often get little recognition for that. In fact, many go unpaid.” Obviously this problem is not only a “Third World” phenomenon for in the USA, according to most current reports, up to 2006, women working full-time still earned only about 70 cents for every dollar a man working full-time earned.

6. Women are the main victims of violence around the world- Amnesty International reports that violence against women and girls is the most pervasive human rights challenge of our times. It cuts across cultural and religious boundaries, political, social and economic status. For many women their home is a place of terror, even in rich societies. There is a call for help against domestic violence every minute in Britain. In Ciudad Juárez, more than 370 poor young women, have been abducted, tortured, raped and murdered in cities on the Mexican/US border without authorities taking proper measures to investigate. In the USA, 700,000 women are reported raped every year. In South Africa, teenage girls are at the greatest risk for rape. Fifty per cent of all murders in Bangladesh are of women by their partners. Around the world, 120 million girls are genitally mutilated. According to World Bank figures, at least one in five women and girls has been beaten or sexually abused in her life time.

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7. Women are the greatest victims of war and internal conflicts- Women are the forgotten victims of war. When nations wage war, men are called to fight while the women are left at home and are expected to live life as usual. Mass destruction of communities results in large-scale disruption and hardship for women and children, forced to flee, while the male members of the community are either executed or they lose contact with their families. Violence against women reaches epidemic proportions with mass rape of women and girls used as weapons of war.

Yes, women might have come a long way, but there is still have a longer way to go.

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