

Empowered Women Empower the World!

“Our school uniform is going to be changed into blazers from 2025!” is what I heard on a school announcement. I was so excited. When I heard that girls can wear slacks, the image of school uniforms such as pants for boys and skirts for girls has greatly changed. Not only can girls be free from the freezing cold of winter, but it’s also good to be able to wear what you want regardless of gender. Nowadays, understanding of diversity in appearance has been increasing, but in my opinion, diversity in thinking and social aspects is also necessary. In order for women to shine in society, I think we should all discuss and understand the social aspects of gender equality.

First of all, old stereotypes have created barriers for many women to advance in society. One of the reasons is the expectation of housework and childcare to fall on women. According to the White Paper on Gender Equality in 2023, there’s a bias of gender roles in Japan. In particular, wives in double-income households spend most of their time on housework, while husbands spend most of their time working. It’s been the norm since childhood and was the same for my parents. However, a survey shows that women in households want to reduce their time spent on housework and childcare, while men want to reduce working hours and increase their time spent on housework and childcare. Surprisingly, the younger generation even more so. I think this is a big turning point. Why don’t we show the next generation how we support our partners to eliminate gender bias in household roles?

Second, I’d like to inquire about the current system’s accessibility. According to the same study, the number of women who think it is better to continue working after having children was 30% in 2000 and 76% in 2022. It’s clear that more women want to be active in society. However, I had a sad experience in the 4th grade. My elementary homeroom teacher suddenly took a break from work in the middle of the semester. She cried in front of the students and said, “I wanted to take good care of my child and my students in class. I tried and it was impossible.” As I saw her crying, I thought if her husband had helped her more at home, she would’ve been able to work happily. Working remotely has become popular since Coronavirus, and promoting flexible work options will make it possible for men to be more active at home. By the way, the news on TV has made headlines about paternity leave. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, only 17% of men actually took it last year. Why? Maybe it's because of a lack of understanding among leaders as well as company employees. The former Minister of the Environment actively took paternity leave. I think it's very important that the leader takes the initiative in demonstrating.

Third, from my experience as a leader, I think women should be active in society. Since I entered junior high school, I’ve been a class representative and in the third grade, a grade president. When I was in the 1st and 2nd grades, the boys were always the grade presidents. I didn't think I could do it at first, but my homeroom teacher encouraged me. Therefore, I believed in my potential and ran for the position. To cooperate with my class, I tried to be a role model for my classmates. I led by doing what I told them to do. With everyone’s support, we reached our goals. Later, the teacher said to me, “See, I knew you could do it! You must be proud of your own growth.” By being the leaders, I feel more confident, and now I know I’m empowered at school. In the near future, I believe I’ll be empowered in society even after having children. However, there are few female leaders in Japan. I think everyone can be active regardless of gender. Let’s empower the women around us. I want them to know their power and bring ideas that make use of women's perspectives. I believe empowered women empower society.

Japan is gradually diversifying, and various systems are in place to help women advance in society. However, traditional gender stereotypes often make barriers against that. Now it’s time to change society with our own hands. Know your power and be confident. Encourage the women around you, and support each other. Then, we can create our ideal ways of living and working, where we can shine both at work and at home. Let's create such a society together, and we can empower the world!