



*About the author: Tejas often finds himself thinking aimlessly while smelling the roses.*

“Homo sapiens first appeared on Earth at least half a million years ago. During this time, we have outlived many of our fellow cohabitants of this planet. There are many factors that have enabled us to persist until now—one of the most important being intellect. We have the great fortune of being able to quickly identify patterns and generate complex rules of the universe around us.

Let us fast forward to a hypothetical post-apocalyptic scenario in which the world we live in is overtaken by zombies, which can be defined as crazed, predatory, and cannibalistic human beings. I wake one morning to the sound of a clan of ravenous zombies clawing furiously at the front door. If I was provided the opportunity to blindly select James or Mary\*, on name alone, to provide me aid in fending these zombies off so that I could live to see

another day, my decision would be obvious: James. Though this is a ridiculous scenario, it serves to illustrate a larger issue. From my experiences growing up in my environment for 24 years, my mind has derived that men are stronger than women. When faced with an egregious lack of time or resources to properly evaluate each candidate, I would make a decision with a gender-based rule of thumb. However, I have a dream that this decision will be a real head-scratcher for my grandchildren. I dream this decision can be as confusing as whether I would choose a blonde male or a brunette male to help me in my plight.

There are two factors that went into this stereotype.

1. Real-world experiences. In my day to day life, I have seen with my own eyes that men are stronger than women on average.
2. Environmental influences. This belief is integrated into the environment around me. Subtle and non-subtle cues might suggest/remind me of this rule, further reinforcing my beliefs.

What’s really interesting is that these factors feed into each other in a cyclical fashion. The more this stereotype is hardcoded into the environment, the fewer opportunities women will receive, furthering the gender gap between men and women. This leads to real-world experiences by us, observing this general rule of thumb: Men are stronger than women.

The question that must be raised for this stereotype, amongst others, is **should** men be expected to be stronger than women? Absolutely not. Unfortunately, these stereotypes that have created a gap between genders have been further twisted and taken advantage of to generate a new brand of oppressive stereotypes that are either not possible to verify or depressing realities due to the widening gender gap (i.e. the education discrepancy). A widening gender gap paves the way for rape culture, domestic abuse, and the general lack of support for women’s welfare.

When we are born, we do not choose our race, our gender, our height, our class, and our weight. These are the features we are born into, and ideally are comfortable with. Nobody wants to be the black sheep and we all largely strive for acceptance and equal/fair treatment.

It is paramount that efforts are made to narrow the gap between men and women. Fortunately for us, against unfair odds, we bear witness to some of the most influential female leaders in the world in the 21st century. Women are becoming a more influential part of important conversations and the average American, along with the rest of the world, is beginning to question their own fundamental stereotypes around women. Furthermore, there is an abundance of programs that provide opportunities and benefits for the next generation of women to champion this great initiative. Despite this, many women are still going through abuse. Providing aid to these women is where Maitri truly shines. This organization does a phenomenal job of tending to those who have undergone both physical and emotional distress and reassures them that their own future, in addition to the future of women, is bright.

Eradicating these harmful stereotypes against women serves to break these self-fulfilling cycles and move humanity towards one where human beings are weighed down less by the baggage associated with arbitrary genes assigned to them at birth. A society where everyone is provided more opportunity and acceptance, thus allowing them more attainable control, stability, and peace of mind.”

*\* James and Mary are the most common male and female names in the United States as per U.S. Census Bureau poll 2005.*