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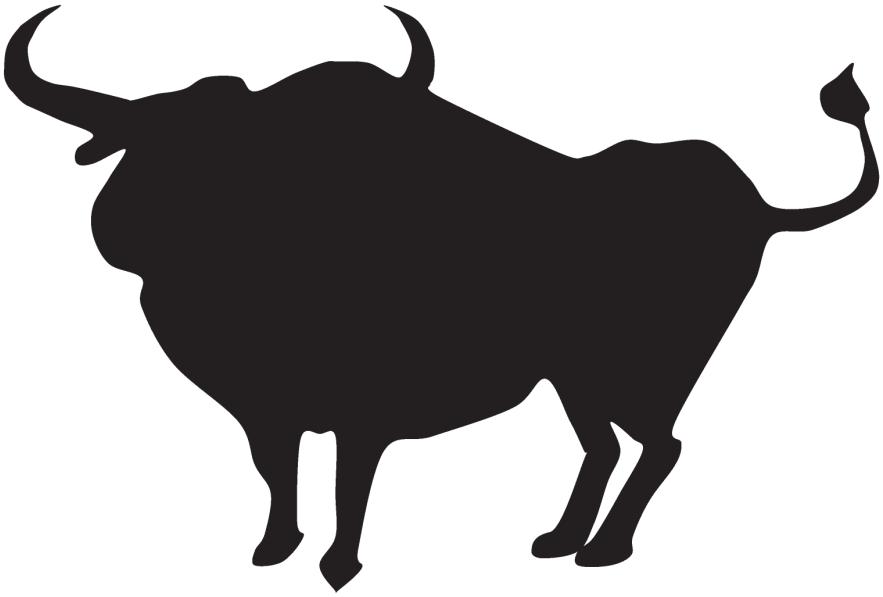

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2017 | Y5 | GP CT2 Yeo Shi Wen | 18A13A

"We can never close the gender divide." Do you agree?

A famous adage Chinese goes "Women hold up half the sky". 2016 saw a shift toward such progressive mindsets with regard to gender roles. With popular figures such as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Hollywood actress Emma Watson publicly supporting feminism and championing gender equality, it really does give us hope of closing the gender divide. However, it is the very same year that also saw misogynist Donald Trump, who wanted to grab women "by the pussy", elected to power as the President of the United States. Some espouse the view that we can never close the gender divide due to legislative barriers and sexist mindsets that persist and are pervasive in society today. However, it is my view that while closing the gender divide will be difficult, it is not impossible, due to changing attitudes in legislature and shifts in societal mindsets towards women. Therefore, though it will be difficult, closing the gender divide is indeed possible.

Some espouse the view that we can never close the gender divide because there exist legislative barriers that institutionalise gender discrimination and perpetuate gender inequality. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to make major decisions for themselves, or even drive themselves to the nearest hospital in the case of an emergency. As Pakistani Malala Yousafzai related in her address to the United Nations General Assembly, the Taliban, which rules over large swathes of the Middle East, bans women from going to school. In many of these countries, legislation expressly denies women certain fundamental rights such as freedom of movement and education, and given that this gender inequality is so deeply institutionalised and entrenched in legislation, it is not hard to see why it may seem impossible to close the gender divide. On the other end of the spectrum, in more liberal countries, the situation seems very grim as well. In countries such as Japan and Korea, more maternity leave is given than paternity leave, alongside other sexist policies. Thus, women are offered lower-paying jobs as a trickle-down effect, since they are seen as unprofitable to hire as they are just going to "get married and have children". Women in developed countries are also regularly subject to abuses,

due to the lack of legislative protection for their rights- for instance, in Singapore, marital rape is not illegal and in India, 52% of women when interviewed said it was normal for a husband to abuse them if they did something without his permission. Across developing and developed, illiberal and liberal countries, a disturbing trend seems to be emerging- legislation either explicitly hurts women and promotes sexism, or it condones behaviours that hurt women and promote sexism. It remains a deeply painful and saddening reality that the patriarchy continues to be entrenched in legislature, and ingrained in societal institutions, leading some to believe that we can never close the gender divide.

Some also espouse the view that we can never close the gender divide because traditional mindsets that promote gender inequality persist in society. The reference to "traditional mindsets" is likely what led 56% of women who voted for Donald Trump to do so. Most people in society continue to harbour patriarchal views regarding men and women- for instance, in China, many still practice sex-selective abortion because it is seen as better to have a son to carry down the family name. Even for those who have daughters, those who do not marry by a certain age are termed "shengnu or "miserly spinsters" while unmarried boys are called "swinging bachelors". This is symptomatic of "zhongnanqingnu" or patriarchal views in China that promote different gender expectations, exacerbating the gender divide. Women are expected to be demure and passive, while men must be strong and powerful, the main breadwinner for the family. This is exacerbated by the media as well, which promotes gender expectations, foisting unfair expectations on both men and women to conform. For instance, in the 2012 London Olympics, a news agency did a word cloud of the words TV commentators most commonly used to describe athletes, and it turns out, while they used words that highlighted mental fortitude for men ("persevere", "determined", "confident"), they preferred words describing physical characteristics for women ("toned", "slim", "sexy"). A case in point would be when Hungarian swimmer Katinka Hozzu won a gold medal and smashed records in her event, the TV commentator immediately cut to a shot of her jubilant husband and declared "there's the man responsible". The media also promotes gender expectations surrounding body image- most recently, on social media, girls have been participating in the "A4 waist challenge" which challenges them to take a picture of themselves if their waist can fit within an A4 sheet of paper. Even

men have not been left untouched by such media pressures and are often expected to be muscular, toned or fit, like people such as Theo James who regularly grace the cover of magazines such as Men's Health. These gendered expectations persist in society and lead to many tangible ramifications- less so for men, because these trends benefit them financially, but more so for women because this leads to very real economic harms- unemployment, less pay, being prevented from pursuing jobs in specific fields, among others. Thus, due to patriarchal mindsets that persist, some believe that we can never close the gender divide.

In view of all these challenges, it will indeed be difficult to close the gender divide. However, it is my view that closing the gender divide is not completely impossible- there is hope. Firstly, there have been changing attitudes in legislature that have led to tremendous progress for women's rights on paper. In terms of the right to political representation, it has been growing- in the recent US Presidential elections, Hillary Clinton made history as the first women nominee from a large party. In Canada, Justin Trudeau made half the ministers in his cabinet women. This trend holds for less developed countries as well. In Rwanda, close to half of their parliament comprises women, and in Oman, 5 women were recently elected into power. Influential women are emerging in government all over the world- Park Geun Hye, Aung San Suu Kyi and Angela Merkel to name a few. They have been influential, with Angela Merkel pulling the European Union out of the Eurozone crisis, and they have also adopted policies that have progressed women's rights. Even in countries without a female head of government, changes in legislature have indeed been growing to ameliorate gender inequality and boost the rights of women. For instance, in Japan, Shinzo Abe has increased rights for women in order to stimulate the aging economy and get more women into the workforce. Evidently, legislature has been changing to increase rights for women and enact gender parity, closing the gender divide. With this upward trend, it is still possible for us to close the gender divide in the near future.

Secondly, there has also been shifting societal attitudes towards women, which gives us hope of closing the gender divide. As can be seen from the millions all over the world who marched in the Women's March earlier this year, more people are becoming aware of the need to close the gender divide. Now, more than ever, people are reading works such as "Lean In" by Sheryl Sandberg,

"The Second Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir" and "The Feminist Mystique" by Elaine Showalter to better acquaint themselves with feminine issues and shatter male centric conceptions of power. People's attitudes towards women are shifting and people are beginning to realise the importance of women's rights, not only because they help bolster the economy, but also because every single human being, regardless of gender, should not be held back from pursuing any opportunities simply by virtue of the birth lottery. The media has also contributed positively to this trend of shifting mindsets that gives us hope of closing the gender gap- for instance, United Nations Women recently had a social media campaign fronted by Hollywood star Emma Watson called #HeForShe, emphasising the importance of men in helping to promote gender equality by supporting the feminist movement. Such campaigns have even taken off locally, thanks to efforts by groups such as the Singapore Committee for United Nations Women and also the Association of Women for Action and Research Education (AWARE) which seek to secure gender equality locally. Though up till now, my discussion has mainly centered on women, men have also experienced positive shifts in mindsets towards them. If gender equality is to be secured, no gender should end up being superior to another. Thus, efforts on social media have also helped ameliorate unfair expectations of men. Cognisant of the fact that many men are reluctant to seek help for mental health issues as it is viewed as "unmanly", stories about men who defy gender expectations have also gone viral on social media- from a video about a teacher telling a boy that "it's OK to cry", to a male nurse who made a cancer patient's day, to stories about boy ballerinas, these viral stories have been instrumental in helping to break down unfair stereotypes surrounding men, promoting gender equality in the long run. Thus, it is highly possible that due to shifting societal attitudes that promote gender equality, the gender divide will be closed some day.

In conclusion, the gender divide is a keenly felt pain today for many young girls across the world. It manifests in the form of the glass ceiling, in the form of girls being denied education and in the form of the many women who have to grit their teeth and endure unfair stigma foisted upon them; often even by the very same governments that promised to protect them. However, with the growing trend towards more rights for women on paper, coupled with the shifting societal mindsets that prefer gender equality over gender expectations, it is completely possible that our generations will be able to close the gender

divide in our lifetime. While I do not deny that this will be a very difficult task in the face of the many barriers mounted, I hold out hope and a firm conviction that some day in the near future, it is entirely possible that a girl will earn as much as her brother, that unfair gender expectations would not be foisted upon them both, and that they will have access to the same opportunities regardless of gender. The glass ceiling can be broken, and with enough effort and unity, we can indeed close the gender divide.

Teacher's Comments:

This is a very objective, consistently argued and ultimately convincing essay. Unlike many other candidates who attempted this question, you did not dismiss positive trends in the area of gender equality, but properly discussed them in the context of several key areas. Keenly argued, well-illustrated and supported.

Language use is excellent. Not only are ideas clearly presented, words and phrases are often skilfully and eloquently used to make difficult ideas easy to understand.

2017 | Y5 | GP CT1 Siobhan Tan | 18A13A

"We can never close the gender divide." Do you agree?

The struggle for gender equality is one of the most enduring social movements of our time. Over the past few decades, we have witnessed a vast improvement in the status of women in relation to their male counterparts - a sign that the fight for gender equality has seen significant improvements in our society. Yet, the chasm between males and females continues to persist in our society, in many arenas of social life, and this has led some to believe that the gender divide is insurmountable. In my opinion, however, this disparity can be alleviated and the march towards complete gender parity is indeed on a path to eventual success.

Those who believe otherwise often cite innate biological differences between males and females, which they deem to be irreconcilable. Proponents of this view argue that women are physically weaker than men, and this means that they are incapable of levelling up to men, especially when it comes to male domains of power, such as the military. Some also argue that women are inherently inferior in terms of leadership capabilities. This is because the general dispositions of women tend to be more docile and meek, and women leaders have been shown to favour consensus-building approaches in their leadership styles. These qualities are said to be incompatible with the workplace and effective leadership, in a workplace environment that fetishises authority and dominance. Thus, the gender divide can be said to be impossible to close, since women are fundamentally different from men.

Yet, this view suffers from a pessimistic and anachronistic conception of the world that does not square with reality. Innate biological differences do not necessarily have considerable impacts on a woman's ability to function optimally in her professional capacity. A relative lack of physical strength does not empirically impede one's cognitive faculties and intellectual development, nor does it mean that one would be less able to command the respect and trust of one's subordinates. It is absurd to claim that the muscularity or physical stature of an individual should limit one's abilities. Even where physical capability is important, we have witnessed how many women have been able to

overcome these barriers to success. The widely revered Serena Williams, for instance, is often lauded as the world's best tennis player in history, irrespective of her gender. The rise of female participation in traditionally male domains of labour further disproves this view - In Norway and Israel, women constitute nearly half of the military, even in the upper ranks as generals and commanders. This demonstrates that while inherent differences between men and women exist, they are not impossible to overcome and women can nonetheless attain success despite their existence.

Another argument that is often raised is the idea that hostile societal attitudes have ossified to the extent that many individuals in society will never be able to accede to demands for full gender parity. Many argue that religions and cultural traditions often prescribe entrenched conservative beliefs, such as the idea that 'the male should always be the head of the house', which means that many segments of civil society will never be accommodating of gender equality, given that it assaults their core systems of belief. From this perspective, the progress of women is subjected to the tyranny of conservative views that will almost never be dismantled; thus, these inhibitions towards full gender parity will continue to persist, and hold back the march towards complete equality.

To some extent, I am sympathetic to the above viewpoint, in that I agree that societal opinions are deeply ingrained and difficult to alter. However, these mindsets and prevailing schools of thought are not static. In the 1960s, systemic violence and aggression towards African Americans by the white majority in the United States led many to believe that the African American community would never be able to escape a fate of subjugation and persecution by white supremacist factions of society. It was inconceivable at the time that America would then proceed to elect a black president, on two occasions, less than five decades later. Just a few decades ago, women were not granted full voting rights, and were prohibited from participation in many areas of civic life. It was unthinkable at the time that relatively conservative societies like Taiwan and Myanmar would have elected Tsai Ying Wen and Aung San Suu Kyi into the halls of power in their respective countries. The annals of history have made it clear that societal attitudes and opinions are malleable and can keep pace with developments within society. Today's millennials are far more accepting of progressive causes like gender equality than their parents or grandparents were at their age. Similarly, many churches

around the world have become more amenable to increasing female participation in the church - Hillsong Church in Australia and Wesley Methodist Church in Singapore are among the many churches globally that have significantly increased the number of female pastors involved in church leadership in recent years. Crucially, no one is born into this world inherently harbouring prejudice against women, or inherently being averse to gender equality. It is the societies in which they exist that reinforce and entrench such inclinations, but these communities are responsive to competing pressures in society, and will change overtime, as they have throughout the course of history.

The chasm that persists between men and women can be narrowed by state policies, which will ensure that women are accorded an equal claim to success and prominence. Affirmative action policies, for instance, can increase the number of women in key leadership positions within the corporate hierarchy, and these women will then be able to institute policies within companies that cater to the needs of female employees. For instance, females on the board of directors or chief executive officers like Sheryl Sandberg have pushed for stricter anti-discrimination policies in the workplace and for female workers to be given an equal wage to their male counterparts. This will help to eliminate the structural impediments that currently prevent women from ascending the corporate ladder. But the battle for gender equality must also win the war of hearts and minds. In this regard, I believe that schools and parents play a crucial role in shaping societal narratives. In many countries such as South Korea and China, we have witnessed how the media has sought to break down ossified conceptions of masculinity, seen by the rise of male pop stars that adopt more feminine styles of appearance. Schools can also encourage young girls to take on leadership positions, improving their self-confidence and self-assurance. These are critical ways in which we can empower girls of today to become vital women leaders of tomorrow.

The fight for gender equality has achieved considerable progress to date. But to claim that we have reached a plateau, and to halt our progress now would be foolish. The divide between males and females is not insurmountable, and we ought to do more to bend the arc of justice towards equality.

Teacher's Comments:

You've succeeded in using a longer term perspective to establish that a positive, encouraging trajectory of change in the area of gender equality is still unfolding. You've even managed to offer a brief primer on what policies may be feasibly implemented that could make a real difference. Overall, I find your answer considered, even-handed and cogent.

Language is used skilfully to deliver ideas clearly and often with impact. Structure within and across paragraph is very good.

2017 | Y5 | GP CT1 Nadya Bhandari | 17S03Q

**"Social media disconnects more than it connects."
Discuss.**

Facebook. Twitter. Instagram. YouTube. In our increasingly technological age, these platforms appear to be an indispensible part of one's daily life, so much so that a recent poll by *The Guardian* revealed that people spend three to four hours a day on social media alone. That may not seem like much, but to spend one-sixth of the day networking online means one-sixth of the day detached from human reality, isolated from meaningful face-to-face interactions. It is thus little wonder that parents are now lamenting the rise of social media, complaining that it 'disconnects more than it connects'. But is this really true? I beg to differ. In this essay, we will take 'disconnect' to refer to the detachment of individuals from the real world and those around them, and 'connect' to be the building and forging of relationships.[1] Thus, while social media might appear, at first glance, to be the blameworthy factor for increasingly antisocial behaviour, it fundamentally allows people from all works of life to come together over common interests, to meet new people, for governments to update the population and keep society informed, and for the world to reach out and offer support and show solidarity in times of need. Hence, it would be unfair to say that social media disconnects more than it connects.

Proponents of the belief that social media tends to disconnect, like those belonging to the older generation, might believe that it has resulted in a generation of e-teenagers, with their heads bowed, eyes glued to the screen, thumbs twitching. They criticise social media as having made people superficial and concerned with the image that they portray to the world when they upload photos on Instagram or Facebook. Many feel that given the carefully curated social media feeds that only showcase the positive and happy aspects of one's life, it is impossible to build lasting relationships since the picture presented of one's life is inauthentic. A recent study by University of South

[1] Editor's comments: This awkward insertion could have been avoided if you had integrated the analysis into your previous sentence (e.g. " It is thus little wonder that parents are now lamenting the rise of social media, complaining it detaches their children from the real world and those around them, hindering them from forging relationships.")

Texas revealed that nearly 2.5 billion photos were uploaded onto Facebook in a single month alone. In an interview with top social media influences on Instagram, they admitted to using social media as a platform to portray the best, most perfect lives to the public, such that they gain a following, fame, and fortune. Thus, it is little wonder that people believe social media disconnects – if everyone who uses it focuses on curating, 'perfecting' their lives and getting more 'likes', they would be so obsessed in their own bubble world, and obviously neglect those around them. They would feel the need to constantly refresh their news feeds, check for new followers, or just keep updated with every new post of someone else's life, for fear of missing out. In this sense, if one's mind is always caught up in social media affairs, his/her bonds with those around him/her would definitely weaken.

However, the above is but one admittedly undesirable aspect of social media. It would be myopic to say that this is all social media stands for – the sharing of 'selfies' and the garnering of 'likes'. Those who use social media solely for the purposes above actually only constitute a small fraction of social media users worldwide, and other objectives of social media actually do connect rather than divide our community and world.

Firstly, on an individual level, social media is a platform for users of similar interests to reach out and connect, and even share tips and tricks of the trade. Sites like YouTube, Instagram and even Pinterest are free for everyone to access, and have their own mobile application that makes its usage even more convenient. For example, it is not uncommon to see budding photographers connecting with aspiring models on Instagram to come up with stunning photo shoots that improve both the photographer's resume and the model's portfolio. On Youtube, cooking channels like 'The Scran Line' draws in viewers from all over the world who leave their opinions and ask cooking-related queries in the comment section of the page, to which others reply with their own advice. This is a fine example of how social media brings together people from around the world in pursuit of common interests. On a more intimate level, a study by a dating website revealed that couples who first met online, either through social media chats or dating sites, are 47% more likely to remain married for a longer period of time. Thus, there inherently must be something about the way social media connects individuals to have such a lasting impact.

Secondly, on a national level, governments use social media as an efficient way of disseminating information to the public, and to update the public on recent happenings in the country. This generates online discourse that extends into bringing people together in real life, and allowing them to express their views. In Singapore, for example, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's Facebook page is frequently splashed with 'selfies' of him at various events, interacting with members of the public. A 'selfie' with the prime minister has thus become popular, with many flocking to such events island wide for a change to talk to the Prime Minister, and perhaps get that elusive 'selfie'. Another example would be Donald Trump's Twitter account, which he uses regularly to update the world on his doings at the White House, to which every post generates plenty of buzz, both online and off, as people praise or criticize his actions. How can something like this be construed as a disconnect?

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, social media is an indispensible tool in times of need, used to rally for change or call for help. These functions definitely meaningfully engage people around the world, thereby connecting people over difficult times. A way in which social media was used to effect positive change was the Yulin Dog Festival in China. Angered by the inhumane treatment of dogs to be slaughtered for the festival, animal activities took to social media like Facebook to petition for the festival to be cancelled. They received an outpouring of support from animal lovers around the world, thanks to the wide-reaching arms of social media, and this year, for the first time in over a hundred years, the Yulin Dog Festival was cancelled. Would this outcome be possible without thousands of people banding together for a cause they are passionate about? I do not think so. More recently, the bombing in Manchester generated a hashtag on Twitter - #roomformanchester, which saw hundreds of those living in Manchester opening up their homes to those who might need a place to stay or rest after the attack, offering food, water, and even phone chargers. Many parents also used social media to find their missing children, and many have been successfully reunited with their child due to the help of strangers who chipped in to help. Such instances of social media being used after a major attack abound, and should be enough to convince one that social media can, inherently, connect in times of need.

At the end of the day, what is social media, if not merely an online platform for individual expression? Social media inherently is not all bad; it is how it is being

used that makes a world of difference. Indeed, perhaps the way teenagers employ social media today has given it a bad reputation, but the functions of networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram truly go beyond the superficial to a medium where individuals bond over common interests, where the government interacts with its people and where the world comes together in solidarity and support in times of need. Thus, I believe that social media actually connects more than it disconnects.

Teacher's Comments:

Comprehensive essay; well-written and fully relevant. Discussion is well-handled with relevant substantiation. It reflects a thoughtful and mature discussion of the topic. Good language skills indicate a confident writer.

4

2017 | Y5 | GP CT1 **James Ding | 18S06S**

Are newspapers still relevant in the digital age?

"The digital age is upon us", proclaimed Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX. Indeed, the inexorable march of the digital revolution has caught up with our societies, exposing us to the novel uncertainties that such technologies provide. To many, the newspaper is one prime example of a victim of the digital age, as attested by the precipitously falling subscription rates of papers worldwide. One might then attribute this to the relatively recent rise of new media, or media channels operating exclusively within the digital domain. While it may be true that digital news forms are disseminated with greater speed and efficiency, I am of the opinion that newspapers are still relevant in our digital age. Not only do they play a tremendous role in ensuring the public receives factually accurate and insightful news, newspaper publishers are certainly not oblivious to the need to transition to digital formats.

Detractors often posit that newspapers are obsolete in the digital age, as they are unable to compete with digital platforms on the grounds of convenience and speed. The digital age is one in which news consumers are able to access troughs of information and the latest news at their fingertips. How is this even remotely comparable to the relatively laborious process of buying a daily from a newspaper distributor? In addition to the attendant nuisance of physical bulk, the very nature of the newspaper runs counter to the ideals of convenience – publishers often run countless rounds of fact verification before committing their stories to print - whereas digital media is virtually instantaneous, owing to substantial user bases capable of generating content at a moment's notice. The rise of citizen journalism in Singapore is a clear example of this. With the prevalence of digital devices among the populace, as evidenced by Singapore's mobile ownership rate of over 160%, most readers have the newfound power of recording and broadcasting information about events of interest in their communities. This is manifested in countless citizen journalism websites, such as Stomp and SingaporeWatch, which are the paragon of timely news reporting. It is clear that in today's digital age, newspapers do no justice to consumers'

insatiable demand for minute-by-minute updates, hence casting doubt on their relevance.

However, the convenience of online media then begs the question of whether they can really be trusted. Indeed, it is imperative to acknowledge that the relative expeditiousness of such news forms may come at the cost of their reputation and reliability, which then implies that newspapers, arguably, still have a major role to play in the digital age.

Newspapers are still relevant in the digital age because of the factual accuracy and reliability of news that they provide. As mentioned, newspapers companies conduct the laborious routine of fact-checking as part of their internal checks and balances, but this drudgery might well be the key to ensuring that what the public reads is a meticulously edited and accurate reflection of the situation at hand. Insofar as newspapers are concerned, the formidable economic clout they possess predisposes them to more resources, from manpower on the ground to experienced editors. For example, the New York Times has over 100 foreign correspondents situated in 67 countries, which is a testament to the considerable influence such newspaper conglomerates yield. Consequently, first-hand reporting is made possible and perhaps a more realistic and accurate version of news can be reported. It is then a corollary that digital news forms sorely lack this crucial element of objectivity. Being largely user-generated, the process through which digital news is generated leaves much in doubt regarding their veracity. More often than not, new media companies resort to sensationalism and exaggeration to drive their stories and grab eyeballs. This is often the answer to the economic imperative that they face – more views or 'likes' translate to advertising revenue that funds their operations. While this financial driver is not unique to new media companies, newspapers remain grounded by the equally, if not more important need to uphold journalistic integrity. Worryingly, this fundamental principle is increasingly seen as a peripheral concern by new media agencies, as exemplified by Fox News, an American "alternative news site that purportedly publishes "human interest stories" under the veneer of providing alternate viewpoints. Analysts at the Pew Research Centre have found in a 2013 study on alternate news platforms that over 30% of its content is "exaggerated to a considerable degree". The digital age has been one that is accompanied by the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) economy; the glut of misleading, or even patently false

news online has further asserted the relevance of the newspaper, as many of them remain bastions of truth and reliability in the digital age.

Furthermore, newspapers are still relevant in today's digital age as they provide thoughtful analyses from a variety of viewpoints that effectively drive discourse. The sphere of influence of prominent newspapers extends to distinguished scholars, who are often invited to grace their columns. They then bring whole new perspectives to the reader, drawing on their wealth of experience in the field. For instance, the Straits Times routinely invites luminaries like Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-Large, and Fareed Zakaria, an eminent journalist-turned-academic to comment on domestic and international affairs alike. These insightful pieces are capable of exposing readers to a multitude of approaches and viewpoints, which may have the effect of inviting public discourse as readers' long-held beliefs are challenged or questioned. For instance, in the wake of the Arab Spring, where several Gulf states like Tunisia and Egypt attained freedom from decades of dictatorial rule in stunning coups, many papers such as Al Jazeera (specialising in Middle Eastern affairs) have begun to question its premises by highlighting the true ramifications of these uprisings. What was once a glorious act of collective courage in the public imagination has since acquired shades of controversy, as many who believed in its liberating powers were invited to rethink whether the massive destabilisation brought to these societies was well-handled and whether it is sustainable in the long term. This generated a maelstrom of heated debate on state and international media alike, and out emerged a more well-informed and enlightened populace. By catalysing civic engagement on the pertinent issues of our times, the newspaper ensures its relevance in the present. Even though one might argue that news media also provides these benefits, it might well be the case that due to the high degree of customisability of these platforms, users are often blissfully ensconced in a 'filter bubble'. By virtue of in-built algorithms, they tend to receive content of a fixed nature, which only serves to reinforce existing bias. Coupled with the potentially polarising reporting on such platforms, the nuances of issues may be lost on readers, and the ill-informed reporting that results is detrimental to healthy discourse. Hence, newspapers maintain their relevance in the digital age for providing insightful analyses on key issues and driving public discourse in a productive way.

Moreover, it is worth noting that newspapers are still relevant in the digital age for many have adapted well to the digital medium as seen from the proliferation of digital newspapers. They essentially offer the aforementioned benefits of the physical newspaper, but with the added bonuses of scope and convenience that digital platforms endow. The Guardian, for example, has significantly expanded its online presence in recent years, and the journalistic quality of their pieces shine through even in its digital form, resulting in it being nominated for the coveted accolade of "the world's most independent press" in a Reporters Without Borders conference. The disintermediating powers of the digital medium are well utilised by newspapers too – through online interaction with their readers, they are able to glean authentic feedback which would be far more challenging to obtain otherwise. Therefore, newspapers remain relevant today for their readiness in adapting to the digital age, which allows them to reap the benefits of breadth and convenience.

Lastly, newspapers remain a necessity even in today's digital age, as they reach out to those quarters who may not have access to the technology needed to access digital news platforms. Even within 'digitised economies' such as the US and Singapore, large swathes of the elderly demographic remain digitally-illiterate, and are still primarily reliant on the newspaper among other forms of traditional media for information. This is illustrated by how the figure exceeds 90% in those aged 65 and above in Singapore as shown by a 2014 nationwide poll by Gallup, foregrounding the digital divide that exists. Being valuable members of the wider community, the elderly should not be denied of knowledge of the world's happenings just because they are unable to adapt. At a global scale, this digital divide is perhaps even more apparent, with Amnesty International reporting that over a third of the world's population not having access to the Internet, with a sizeable portion concentrated in developing regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. Due to the extremely rudimentary communication infrastructure in these areas, access to digital or non-traditional news is prohibitively expensive and is but a privilege enjoyed by wealthy elites. For instance, it costs over $100 for 10 MB of mobile data in Mali[2]. Thus, the newspaper is certainly relevant to the digital age for its integral

[2] Editor's comments: While the point is sound, this is a dubious example as it is unclear what currency you are referring to; moreover the statistic does not seem to be based in current reality where 1 GB of mobile data in Mali costs an average of USD$12. A better example might be Guinea Bissau where the same amount of data costs USD$58, exorbitant when we

role in bridging the technological divide between the haves and have-nots, ensuring that anyone who desires news may obtain it readily.

In summary, it is manifest that newspapers are by no means an anachronism in today's digital age. Not to mention their justified reputation for reliable news, newspapers are adaptive to recent digital developments, and provide news access to the digitally deprived. Through newspapers, the public is empowered with timely knowledge of the world's happenings, paving the way for a more socially engaged populace. As such, it is indubitable that newspapers are here to stay even as we enter the digital age.

Teacher's Comments:

A rather impressive essay. Generally, however, a more consistent addressing of 'still relevant' would be good as well considering other uses and functions that newspapers serve.

consider how the average income in Sub-Saharan Africa is about USD$60 a month (sources: Research ICT Africa and The World Bank).

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2017 | Y5 | GP CT1 Gan Chong Jing | 18A13A

To what extent is education an effective way to combat poverty?

The old adage goes: you do not give a starving man a fish, because that only feeds him for a day; rather, you teach him how to fish, and he will never be hungry again. The underlying message of this saying is that we rely on education to uplift the less privileged in society, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to provide for themselves. Education's role in combatting poverty remains a pressing and necessary topic of debate, because our modern world is still riddled with poverty. Even though poverty rates have halved since 1990, almost one-fifth of the world's population remains below the somewhat arbitrary international poverty line of US$1.90 per day. That equates to over a billion people living in economic destitution, unable to attain even the most basic standards of living, and suffering as a result. While it is true that education – formal, institutionalised schooling – is still the primary leveller of socio-economic inequality in our society, due to how it empowers the poor individually to upskill themselves, ensures decent health standards, and ensures overall wealth creation in burgeoning economies, it is definitely not a magical panacea to poverty. This is because pre-existing rich-poor inequality creates an unequal playing field for students, and unfair merit-based educational systems entrench this divide.

Education combats poverty most intuitively because it empowers individuals to pull themselves out of economic destitution. The primary function of education is equipping people with the necessary skills and knowledge for them to be able to survive in the working world. This aids the poor when they enter the workforce by enabling them to be more productive, as well as to upskill themselves into higher, better-paying jobs. So, in rural agricultural communities in India, going to school enables the younger generations to learn modern farming techniques and skills – for example, knowing how to implement regular crop rotation such that the land remains arable, or even attain basic technological proficiencies to operate agricultural machinery like tractors or harvesters. All of this ensures that these rural farmers have a sustainable farming practice, so they get to keep their jobs. It also helps them become

more productive, getting better and better crop yields. This way, beyond mere subsistence farming, they can now sell their surplus and earn more money to afford basic amenities like gas or electricity or even a safe, secure house. Beyond this, education enables one to upskill, if one is unemployed or stuck in low-level industries such as – primary industries like mining or agriculture, that offer lower pay. Getting an education in science and maths can enable the children of illiterate farmers to become technicians, electricians, or even professors and doctors, because they now have the necessary skills and knowledge, as well as the qualifications, to gain employment. Crucially, this is a positive feedback loop, because as individuals upskill and get richer, they can now send more of their children to get educated for longer durations in more expensive schools, so generation by generation, these families inch out of the poverty trap. Education thus becomes the vehicle of social mobility for the poor to move them out of poverty.

Other than enabling upskilling, education also helps individuals in a very crucial but often overlooked way, in that it provides the poor with health education, which gives them better standards of living to help them climb out of poverty. One of the negative externalities of poverty – poor health conditions – is also one of the largest causes of it. Poor health cripples the poor and renders them unproductive and unable to earn money. Moreover, this places massive financial burdens on poor families who must now care for the sick or, if they can even afford it, procure healthcare. Education thus becomes a means to inculcate an awareness of health risks and foster healthy lifestyles in the poor. This could translate to proper sanitary practices in places like rural India, where open defecation causes high rates of cholera, and where women have very little access to sanitary napkins because they are told periods are sinful, and are forced to use sand, ashes or leaves as substitutes, eventually amounting to high incidences of cervical cancer. With fewer debilitating diseases, people are stronger and healthier and more productive. This also translates to basic family planning – teaching women about the consequences of unregulated marital sex and the different avenues of contraception. This empowers women with informed agency to reject childbearing at too young an age, allowing her to go and work so that she is not automatically locked into a domestic role and becomes another financial dependent. This also means lower birth rates so that families struggle less to provide for all their children and have manageable family sizes, helping to mitigate poverty (everybody now gets more money and

resources). And for the children who are born, they live healthier, better lives – educated mothers experience half the child mortality rate of uneducated mothers. All these result in a controlled, healthier population that is better able to work and earn money, unhindered by the financial needs of sick dependents. Clearly, health education uplifts the poor out of poverty.

Lastly, on a larger scale, education also means more wealth creation within underdeveloped economies, allowing economic growth for the entire country, which translates to lower rates of poverty. International studies indicate that sustainable economic growth in a country is predicated on a minimum 40% literacy rate, because poor countries must industrialise in order to get richer. The countries where poverty rates are the highest are often languishing in primary or secondary industries such as agriculture, manufacturing and mining. This means that there are low-skill, labour-intensive industries that are also low-paying. The entire country thus languishes in abject economic conditions. Education solves this by enabling industrial improvement and also expansion, but also upgrading into higher industries. An educated population of workers enables countries to, for example, increase automation in manufacturing and agricultural industries, because workers have the know-how to operate the machines, and factory/land owners are smarter and more willing to implement such practices. These industries are now far more efficient, because one machine can replace many humans' labour and only requires one person to operate it. More profit and a new surplus of workers enable pre-existing industries to expand and grow, which leads to exponential growth in economic gain due to economies of scale, but also mobilises people with adequate education to start and join new industries. Educated people can now become business entrepreneurs because they are equipped with the necessary skills and even knowledge if they acquire, for example, a degree in business. Now, less labour-intensive and more skills-centric or knowledge-centric industries spring up, such as service industries that have more value-add and hence are more profitable. This could even be the formation of highly knowledge-intensive industries like the R&D industry – this was most evident in China, where booming education rates enabled the creation of an "Eastern Silicon Valley" of researchers and manufacturers creating new technology to sell to a global market. All of this industrial upgrading generates more profit for the entire nation, which cuts back on poverty in two ways: firstly, as an economy grows and expands, more and better job opportunities are created, because

there is a demand for labour. Secondly, the state is now able to redistribute wealth, taken in the form of taxes, back to the poorest in society; either through direct financial aid or via the provision of better, subsidised infrastructure and services – cheaper healthcare, housing subsidies, education subsidies – that lower costs of living, to empower the poor to attain better standards of living. In all of these ways, education is a direct and primary way to allow the poor to get richer and lift themselves out of poverty to attain decent standards of living.

However, education is not wholly effective in combatting poverty; in fact, it can sometimes entrench rich-poor divides. The argument for education's effectiveness in beating poverty is premised on the implicit assumption that there is a level playing field that enables poor students to improve themselves and outdo richer students; however, the truth is that pre-existing rich-poor inequality tilts this balance in favour of the rich even within the education system. This means that by virtue of generational poverty inherited from one's parents, poor students are comparatively disadvantaged in the education system. After all, education is akin to an arms race, with socio-economic wealth giving the rich so much more ammunition and resources to get ahead. If a student is rich, his parents are likely in high-skill, high-paying jobs. These students also get to buy books to read from a young age, boosting their literacy, which is one of the greatest determinants of academic performance later on in life. They can afford to go to private schools with the best teachers money can buy, and they gain access to expensive tuition and assessment books that can all aid their learning. Rich families tend to even have a stay-at-home, degree-holding parent, so the children get help them with their homework. Even seemingly unrelated things matter, like having a healthy, balanced and varied diet that enables these students to think and focus better in school and exams compared to poorer students who sometimes go hungry. And crucially, because education is often graded on a relative scale, where students' absolute scores are adjusted based on their position on a bell curve, poorer students' grades may be deflated when richer students do disproportionately better. And without the qualifications that rich students have, poor students will likely be denied high-paying jobs because their rich counterparts seem to be better fits. The poverty trap can thus be reinforced via education.

Moreover, unfair merit-based education systems entrench this aforementioned inequality. The insidious lie of meritocratic systems, which give equal opportunities but deliver unequal rewards, is that the playing field is equal, and so your performance is based on your hard work and capability. It thus creates a veneer of fairness in an unfair system where the rich are systematically privileged; it then entrenches this unfairness by structurally making it difficult for students to move up and down the academic ladder. Streaming students from a young age by results, for example, enables the smartest and richest to exponentially get better as they learn at an accelerated rate, whereas the poorer, in normal or technical streams in countries like Singapore, languish behind and can never catch up. This creates impermeable strata of rich/smart and poor/stupid [3] as the gap between students widens and widens – the smarter students not only get accelerated curriculums but also the best teachers in more high-tech learning environments. All this creates a widening gap that the poor can never bridge – they are simply too far behind academically, and the longer they remain in the system, the more entrenched this divide is. In Singapore, for example, I can never move up from a technical stream to an express stream when my curriculum is two years behind theirs, so I will never be allowed to transfer there. And so I go from a technical stream to ITE, where I am funnelled into some middle level technician training course; this being my only qualification, my job prospects are set and immovable[4]. The rich go to top global universities where they can become industry leaders; hence, as social mobility is denied from me, I can never break out of poverty. This is how aggressively merit-based education entrenches rich-poor divides and creates a poverty trap.

Ultimately, despite these flaws in the execution of the education system – namely, the differing quality of and access to education that the rich and poor get – education remains a necessary, and the primary, mechanism to combat poverty. States implement measures to try and reduce inequality, such as subsidies for the poor and more funding for public, cheap schools; and in any

[3] Editor's comments: Troubling phrasing - these claims are too sweeping and heavy-handed.
[4] Editor's comments: As before, this is far too sweeping. You have seriously over-simplifed the educational system in Singapore and ignored recent developments! Some of these include progressive pathways presently: the fact that a normal stream exists where one can be transferred to the express stream, and the fact that polytechnic courses do admit ITE graduates, contingent on their achieving relevant ITE qualifications.

case, a relatively inferior education is still preferable to no education at all. At the very least, the poor are still able to upskill and slowly but surely make their way upwards.

Teachers' Comments:

In 90 short minutes, you've managed to write an authoritative mini-treatise on education and poverty. The scope of the discussion is tremendous, use of illustrations consistently convincing and extremely well set-out from start to finish. Many students would be unable to produce an essay of this quality even if it was set as homework; you've accomplished this under exam conditions.

If there is a blot, it is the relative heavy-handedness of – and some oversimplication in – the concession paragraphs about education exacerbating inequality (with expressions such as "insidious lie of meritocratic systems" and "veneer of fairness"). These paragraphs could benefit from a more moderate, nuanced approach that seeks to explain why such systems are in place, even if they may not be fully effective.

Use of language is extremely accomplished, sophisticated and helped convey ideas with great clarity. Structure across the essay is very effective.

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Examine the impact that foreigners have on your society.

With the spread of globalisation, ease of mobility has increased. No longer confined to the borders of their countries, many citizens of differing nationalities can now, in search of greener pastures, uproot and leave their country of origin. From the perspective of these foreigners, the benefits of them moving to other nations far outweigh the cost of staying in their home countries. But the same view is not often held by citizens of the new countries these individuals are moving to. For example, the influx of foreigners in Singapore has brought with it a myriad of conflicting opinions. I believe that foreigners have helped the Singapore economy flourish and have exposed us to a variety of cultures. But at the same time, this has also led to increased competition for jobs and resources. Ultimately, the impact that foreigners have are varied and multi-faceted, but in the long run, I believe that the positive impact will eventually negate the negative ones.

Firstly, the impact of foreigner inflow into Singapore can be viewed from an economic point of view. In this aspect, the impact of foreigners coming into Singapore is favourable as it has helped our economy grow and flourish. This is especially so in Singapore, as we have a shrinking workforce due to an aging population. While the ideal replacement rate should be 2.1, the replacement rate in Singapore is a startling 1.2, which is far lower than the ideal. This leads to a smaller working population, which is an extremely pressing problem since Singapore, being without natural resources, must rely on its people to propel its economy. Severe manpower shortages in the country would hence pose a large threat to the vibrancy, efficiency and effectiveness of Singapore's economy, resulting in us losing our competitive edge in the global arena. This is where foreigners come in. Their increased presence in our society helps fill the gaps in the economy, particularly in the services industry where there is a shortage of workers. Being able to employ sufficient workers to do the job would boost productivity, and ensure that our industries are sustainable. This in turn fuels economic growth in our otherwise stagnant economy, prompting the success of our country. Hence, it can be seen that the impact of the

entrance of foreigners in Singapore is positive, particularly in the economic aspect.

Next, the influx of foreigners into Singapore can also be seen to have exposed Singaporean citizens to different cultures, some on which we might not have had the chance to interact with before. When foreigners move into our society, they do not leave their own cultural identities in their home countries, but they instead bring it with them to Singapore. This is, for example, seen in how different ethnicities in Singapore have their own traditional clothing: the *cheongsam* for Chinese women, the *baju kurung* for the Malays, and the *sari* for Indian women. More importantly, there is also an exchange of culture in the area of fashion. For instance, it is not an uncommon sight to see a Chinese girl in a sari. In fact, it has brought out something uniquely Singaporean. In other words, not only do foreigners expose their cultures to citizens of the new country, and let these citizens understand and better appreciate these new cultures, the introduction of these cultures also influence the existing culture of a country. A local example of this would be none other than 'Singlish'. This example of 'Singlish' clearly illustrates that the culture of foreigners has played a part in the shaping of our current Singaporean heritage. As Singapore was an immigrant society, our ancestors were once thought of as our foreigners as well, and it is only with their entrance into our society do we have what makes up our cultural identities as Singaporeans today[5].

However, there are those who are less optimistic about the impact of foreigners on Singapore. This view is based on the increased competition for jobs and other scarce resources in Singapore such as housing and the entrance to top schools or universities. With an increased number of people looking for jobs due to the addition of foreigners, the demand for jobs has increased, but as the supply of these jobs remain relatively constant, jobseekers would now face increased competition with their counterparts for the same job. Furthermore, as some foreign workers are willing to work for a lower wage, the original citizens of the country may find themselves subject to depressed or stagnating wages. The movement of more foreigners into our society would

[5] Editor's comment: A sensible argument backed up, however, with examples that could be more appropriate! Since the question is phrased in the present tense ("Examine the impact that foreigners have on your society") it would be more relevant to examine the cultural contributions of communities currently considered foreign to Singapore.

also undoubtedly lead to an increase in demand for houses as these newly arrived foreigners would need a place to stay. An increased demand coupled with no change in supply would further drive property prices up, which contributes to discontent among citizens. Particularly because Singapore is a land scarce country, the impact of increased demand for housing will be all the more severely felt. Lastly, many Singaporeans also hold the mindset that more foreigners would threaten the chances of their children having a place in a top school or university. In a meritocratic society like Singapore where high academic grades are prized, the thought of even more competition compounds the stress both school students and their parents feel. As such, it can be seen that for those on the other end of the spectrum, the impact of foreigners into Singapore society is not something to be celebrated, but to be lamented as it increases competition and places even more stress on the original citizenry of the country.

I would, however, like to propose a counterargument to the above. I believe that in the long run, the negative impact of foreigners in our society can actually be mitigated. While the idea of increased competition for a limited number of jobs or places in schools is seen to be detrimental, a secondary consideration may lead to a different conclusion. In fact, increased competition from foreigners would actually push Singaporeans to work harder and put in more effort, which will, in turn, increase our competitiveness in the long run. In contrast, not having to compete for positions and merely wait for things to fall into our laps would lead to the weakening of our citizenry, as we grow complacent and choose to rest on our laurels. The presence of foreigners keeps us on our toes, and motivates us to do our best, which will increase our efficiency and productivity. This would produce a more competent workforce in the long run.

Another counter to the idea that "foreigners are stealing our jobs" can also be seen in how the statement, in itself, is not entirely true. While foreign professionals do come into our society and occupy one of the few high-ranking jobs, a majority of foreigners take the form of foreign workers working in jobs that require less skill such as those in the food and beverage industries or in the construction business. In those cases, these foreign workers are not stealing any Singaporeans' jobs because Singaporeans do not even want those jobs in the first place, a frustration voiced by entrepreneur Lyn Lee, the owner

of Singapore's home-grown Small-Medium Enterprise (SME), Awfully Chocolate. It can thus be seen that in most cases, jobs are not even being taken away from Singaporeans by foreigners.

As such, it can be concluded that the impact of foreigners in our country has both positive and negative repercussions. But if we are able to adopt an alternative perspective in viewing the seemingly negative impact, we would realise that the influx of foreigners into our borders is something to be glad about.

Teacher's Comments:
Good knowledge displayed and generally useful illustration presented. Greater depth in evaluation needed at points, but overall, good. Excellently expressed for the most part; good flow.

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"The media is to blame for gender inequalities." Comment.

Gender inequality is a long-standing issue faced by all societies. It refers to the inequality between the male and female gender as a result of certain stereotypes or pre-conceived ideas about the gender that unfairly force limitations or expectations on each side in various aspects. Gender inequality is evident in nearly all social issues – from the career sphere, to the social stratification of genders – no matter how subtle. Some people feel that the media is to blame for this and I believe likewise. While it may not be the sole proponent of gender inequality, media has definitely contributed to the issue by reinforcing gender stereotypes in entertainment, advertising and marketing, and news coverage to influence its receivers' mindsets on gender, which is the cause of many gender issues we face today.

Firstly, the media often reinforces gender stereotypes in media entertainment, through the way each gender is portrayed. For example, in the majority of mainstream movies, the main character is generally male, and the secondary character is female. The female is always second or portrayed as subservient to the man. This can be seen in all genres, from action movies such as the 'James Bond' series, to romantic dramas like 'The Notebook', and even in family-based movies such as 'Cheaper by the Dozen', which focuses mainly on the comedic conflict between two families' fathers. And more often than not, women playing this secondary or supporting character are heavily romanticized, acting mainly as the love interest to the male. This propagates a certain mindset in viewers that women are meant to be second to men, and often their main role and focus of a relationship with a man is meant to be based on romance and passive love. Men, on the other hand, are usually portrayed as fierce, opinionated, strong main characters, who take on the role of saving the day, solving the problem, saving the damsel in distress (which further reinforces the romanticized and unequal relationship between male and female). This gives male viewers a skewed notion that as men, it is their duty to be the hero, to be at the centre of the issue and to resolve the crisis in the end. This exerts a specific pressure on males, then, to step up and assume the role of the alpha in

various situations. As a result, these contrasting stereotype roles placed on men and women respectively work as polarizing forces as men begin to believe they need to be dominating, while women feel they need to be subservient, reinforcing the gender stereotypes, and thus inequality, in society.

Secondly, advertising and marketing in media also plays a significant role in reinforcing gender stereotypes, which leads to widening the inequality between women and men. Looking at the marketing of children's toys alone, we can see how these stereotypes are imposed on society. If you walk down the aisle of a toy store, most likely the toys will be split into a boys' section and a girls' section. The boys' section will be mostly full of blue, black or green toys, colours that are considered "masculine", while the girls' toys are usually pink, purple or white, which are "feminine" colours. Studies have shown that male-specific toys have representations of many occupations which encourage adventure, exploration and innovation – action figures of astronauts, race car drivers, construction builders, cowboys and so on – and toys that stimulate their critical thinking and intellectual abilities, such as LEGO, which is very popular with boys but less so with girls. On the other hand, girl-specific toys limit themselves to representing very domestic, nurturing and docile roles – dolls that are princesses, teachers, dancers and more – and girl-specific toys are usually more related to whimsical and frivolous activities like having tea parties, or domestic activities such as cooking. The disparity of what children are exposed to, especially at such a young age, narrows their perception of the scope of what they as a girl or boy can do – boys feel that they can engage in challenging, adventurous tasks and can pursue unconventional, boundary-pushing jobs in the future, while girls may feel that it is more appropriate to take on domestic, nurturing roles in society and in the workplace. Conversely, boys feel it inappropriate to engage in domestic or nurturing tasks, as it is "for the girls to do". This sort of gender stereotypes in marketing toys causes a vicious cycle, where the expectations of each gender are reinforced repeatedly, causing the inequality to widen.

Finally, the type of news coverage on each gender is also very specific and hence limiting, which contributes to the flawed perception of gender roles. Research shows that many women who are featured in news articles or interviews for being successful individuals in their own sector are often asked questions related to their personal life, or how they balance their work and

family. Instead of placing emphasis on their achievements and contributions to the particular sector, the media often focuses on the woman in relation to the pre-conceived ideas of female gender roles. Men, however, firstly get a greater quantity of news coverage, and the type of coverage revolves mainly around their occupation, their contributions and their achievements. This yet again propagates the idea that men are more capable than women occupation- or achievement-wise, while women have the higher hand in all things domestic.

Of course, it is unfair to blame the media solely for causing and worsening the issue of gender inequality – there are many other factors that play a huge role in widening the gender gap, such as cultural beliefs, education (or lack thereof) and so on. Furthermore, media has started to open up and break away from stereotypical representation of gender. However, it still stands that historically and up to the present, the perpetuation of gender roles and limitations that are imposed on men and women which cause the inequality has been widely enforced and reinforced by media.

In conclusion, it is justifiable to blame media for the gender inequality faced in society. With such a wide reach and impact on individuals, media has, through entertainment, advertising and marketing and news coverage, perpetuated gender-related expectations which have influenced people's mindsets about gender, and likely to have a lasting impact on gender inequality in society.

Teacher's Comments:
This essay was focused and insightful, showing good understanding of the requirements and using what's been taught effectively. Although many points could have benefited from a greater depth of evaluation, this is generally very good.

Strong command of language and organisation demonstrated, although the transitions need work.

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