

WP's He Ting Ru recounts GE experience when asked if media reinforces gender stereotypes

Goh Yan Han

The Straits Times, 3rd June 2021

SINGAPORE - When she was first fielded as a Workers' Party candidate in the 2015 General Election, Ms He Ting Ru, then single, said reporters asked about her marital status, if she was dating anyone, and whether she was planning to have children.

"They looked at me and saw this young female person and the immediate thought there was when am I going to go off and start a family," she said.

In contrast, her fellow Marine Parade GRC candidate Terence Tan, who was also single at the time, was asked where he saw Singapore's economy going.

Ms He and Mr Tan are now married with two children.

Ms He, now an MP for Sengkang GRC, recounted the anecdote on Thursday (May 3) when asked about the media and its role in reinforcing gender stereotypes [during a dialogue at the Institute of Policy Studies Women's Conference.](#)

She added that many such questions were posed to her by female journalists.

"I think we need to be mindful that as women sometimes we can be very harsh on women as well... We need to be mindful of the fact that sometimes women can be another woman's harshest critic," she said.

However, she added that local media is "nowhere near the levels" seen in some countries, where "it's really bordering on the unacceptable".

Minister for Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam, who also spoke as a panellist, said in response to the same question that there are a large number of highly educated women in the media who understand that one's ability should be assessed not on the basis of gender, but what one is able to produce.

His sense was that significant parts of society understand this as well, he added.

"The glass is two-thirds full, but it's not fully full and there's more to go."

There are instances of objectification - where women or men are projected in a certain way - to sell more copies of a newspaper or magazine, he said.

It will take a whole-of-society effort to address the matter, Mr Shanmugam added.

The Government can put out a framework on what constitutes pornography, but standards and a proper way of discourse are needed as well, he said, adding that Singapore media has not crossed as many lines as compared with media elsewhere.

The dialogue was moderated by Singapore Management University president Lily Kong.