

Gender and Society: A Sociological Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Gender and society investigates how cultures define roles, behaviours, and identities for men, women, and other genders, distinguishing them from biological sex, in order to better understand systemic inequalities, social structures (such as patriarchy), and how class, race, and sexuality intersect to shape experiences, opportunities, and power dynamics across societies and institutions. It's about learnt masculinity and femininity, not just biology, influencing everything from work to family life while challenging old norms through feminism and queer theory. Sex is biological; gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities that a society considers proper for each sex. In contrast to sex, which is assigned at birth, gender is learnt, differs among cultures, and changes over time. A system in which men wield main power, resulting in ingrained gender inequity and women's disadvantaged position. How gender intersects with other identities to produce distinct experiences of advantage or oppression. Gender relations are basically about power and inequality, which influence access to education, employment, health care, and political power. Gender norms are reinforced or challenged in families, businesses, legal systems, and religious institutions.

Keywords:Examines movements and cultural developments that question established gender roles and promote equality, as well as the process by which individuals learn gender roles, frequently via family, peers, the media, and institutions, and how this influences their behaviour.

Introduction:

Feminist scholars, academicians, and researchers frequently use the terms 'sex' and 'gender' to distinguish between biologically different 'male' and 'female' and socially constructed 'man' and 'woman'. In general, the term 'gender' is employed as an analytical tool to understand societal realities that affect men and women. So, we may say that gender is a systematic way of perceiving men and women as social beings, as well as the structured pattern of their relationships. According to feminist texts, gender and its variations are neither biological nor natural, but rather a socio-cultural creation of patriarchal society. People used to believe that the terms sex and gender were interchangeable and that there was no difference between them. It was also assumed that the various roles, statuses, and qualities or attributes associated with men and women in society are defined by biology, i.e. sex, and that this is natural and permanent, as if God-given. Weir and Wilson, in *Scientific Organism in Patriarchal Norms* as a result, socialist feminists are unable to: “accept the separation of women's oppression from all other oppressions...in a class society, women had to form alliances with other exploited and oppressed groups to free themselves and their sisters...in a class society, women had to form alliances with other exploited and oppressed groups to free themselves and their sisters...in a class society, women had to form alliances with other exploited and oppressed groups to free themselves”¹ (p. 79)

Gender Roles and Socialization:

Gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological characteristics associated with males and females in particular social circumstances. Thus, we may say that sex determines whether we are male or female, whereas gender determines whether we are masculine or feminine. Sex is an attributed status since people are born with it, whereas gender is an acquired status because it must be learnt. We understand what sex and gender are, but it is difficult to distinguish what is innate and what is socially produced. Scholars have provided a variety of reasons for the difficulty in determining what is natural and what is socially produced. As soon as a kid is born, parents and society begin the process of 'gendering'. Gendering or gender indoctrination refers to the special socialisation process by which youngsters learn their gender roles. For example, in Indian culture, the birth of a male is celebrated with love, respect, and fine food, whereas the birth of a daughter is mourned. Not only that, but boys are pushed to be strong and tough, while girls are urged to be humble and homebound, with the expectation that they will help their mother in the kitchen. According to Kamla Bhasin, all of these differences are a result of societal

gender stereotypes. This seemingly basic distinction conceals a slew of issues linked with its application. It assumes that all humans can be simply classified into clear either-or categories. Certainly, the assigned status of sex is less likely to change than the acquired status of gender. Some people, however, believe they were born with the "wrong" body and are willing to undergo extensive surgery to align their gender identification with their biological sex. Some societies, however, allow people to freely transition between genders, regardless of their biological sex. When Shulamith Firestone defines radical feminism, she makes an excellent point:

“The new feminism, according to radical feminists, is not just the resurgence of a real political movement for social equality, but also the second wave of humanity's most crucial revolution. The goal of radical feminism is to topple the world's oldest and most strict caste system: the sex-based class structure, which has been solidified through thousands of years, giving stereotypical male and female roles an undeserved sexual validity and seeming stability. The feminist movement in the West represents the beginning of a long fight to break free from the repressive power system established by Nature and supported by men”²(p.16).

Patriarchy and Power Structures:

The nature of patriarchy varies among different classes in the same society, as well as among societies and time eras. However, the essential concepts remain the same, namely, men are in power, but the nature of this authority may vary. For example, the experience of patriarchy was not the same in our grandmothers' time as it is today; it differs between tribal women in tribal society and upper-caste Hindu women; women in the United States and women in India. Each social system or historical epoch demonstrates differences in how patriarchy operates, as well as in social and cultural practices. Gender division of labour, also known as sexual division of labour, is the practice of assigning distinct duties, responsibilities, and tasks to men and women based on cultural expectations of what men and women should and are capable of. Girls and boys, women and men are assigned different activities and obligations based on their gender roles, rather than their particular preferences or talents. The sexual division of work notion outlines how labour is divided in society based on sex. Women's job, or work done by women, has historically been considered less essential or secondary to that of males. Thus, the concept of the sexual division of labour explains why men do some kinds of work and why women do other kinds of work. Only recently, the concept of the sexual division of labour emerged as a central concern in feminist debates and writings. Simone in *The Second Sex* said:

"The situation of woman is that she-a free and autonomous being like all human creatures-nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other."³ (p.295)

The introduction of industrialisation and modernisation resulted in several changes in the social and economic areas of activity. As a result, it had influenced the roles of men and women in society. As a result, feminist writers focused on altering societal institutions, as well as shifting patterns of labour division and its effects for women. They also attempted to explain the change from family to factory production, as well as the implications for the sexual division of labour and women's social standing. Feminist writers have highlighted two similar points: first, that throughout history, most men and women considered women's work as less essential than men's work. Second, the division of labour was primarily classified by sex, which varied according to the social, cultural, economic, and historical background of the society and bore different connotations depending on the context. Finally, Friedan declares that there is a need:

"Women's needs for self-fulfilment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, uniqueness, and self-actualization are just as vital as men's, and women's sexual needs are just as significant. In this sense, women's sexual issues are by-products of their underlying drive to develop and fulfil their human potentialities, potentialities that the mystique of feminine fulfilment overlooks."⁴ (p.264)

Iranian women were everywhere, keeping pace with the movement's growth. They purposefully divorced so that no one had any obligation to anyone or anything other than the Khomeini regime. This was done to shatter the concept of male domination that had united Iranian men and women. Their women chose to embrace this society's notion of womanhood as the weaker sex, as well as to abandon their traditional position, which required them to have a partner in order to be accepted. In the same line, feminists advocated that husbands respect their wives' right to choose between a private life and a life of struggle. They needed to learn to see women not as women, but as equal human beings.

Women's Education and Social Development:

Many women have acquired power as a result of increased access to education and opportunities, but this may also create a sense of responsibility and the desire to define one's purpose and social contribution. The different issues that women

from various cultural, ethnic, and financial backgrounds may face add to the complexities of their existential journeys. It is vital to recognise the variety of human experiences and address the concept of existential crises with compassion. As a result, the community experienced an increase in rape, seduction, domestic abuse, mental instability, sexual harassment, and divorce. Women, like men, may struggle with identity, meaning, and purpose throughout their lives as a result of various societal, cultural, and personal forces. Indian culture has always been steeped in tradition and patriarchy. Fathers have always sought boys since they are supposed to carry on the family name and hope to achieve their own goals. As a result, fathers expect their kids to obey without inquiry, denying the son the opportunity to develop independently. Girls in Indian society suffer from birth to death. When they give birth, they neglect because they are not allowed to pass on the family name like male children; after marriage, they suffer from their father's in-law house; and as they get older, they suffer at the hands of their son. So they have no self-identity and are always suffering from a type of existential crisis, as we have noticed till now. Sushila Singh in *Feminism: Theory, Criticism, Analysis*, says:

"The word 'feminism', however, must be understood in its broadest sense as referring to an intense awareness of identity as a woman, and interest in feminine problems. Its meaning should not be restricted to the advocacy of women's rights.... The word 'feminism' has picked up so many connotations of late that it seems to have no precise meaning and what it stands for may be easily misunderstood. According to Janet Radcliffe Richards, feminism has a strong fundamental case, is intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex', the proposition is to be regarded as constituting the essence of feminism."⁵ (p.21-22)

In 1848, the first girl's school was established in India with the goal of providing girls with a better education and increasing their chances. It was advantageous to women's education, but other than teaching, women had no other possibilities for dignified employment. Women gained confidence through education, and many of them engaged in a variety of social service professions, including jail reform, alcoholism, child abuse, anti-slavery campaigns, and supporting women's issues such as reforms to marriage and divorce laws. The demand for political liberty was next. Women received political rights gradually in a number of countries. New Zealand (1893), Finland (1906), Norway (1913), Denmark and Iceland (1915), the

Soviet Union (1917), the United States of America (1920), the United Kingdom (1928), and India after independence were the first nations to provide women electoral equality to males. After World War I or in the aftermath of World War II, numerous additional nations gave women suffrage. The feminist movement was transformed into a revolution in the 1960s.

Gender Inequality in the Workplace:

Every society has different standards for males and females, boys and girls, women and men, that influence practically every element of their lives and destiny. In most countries, girls and boys, as well as women and men, are dressed differently. In some communities, the distinctions are minor; in others, they are rather apparent. The following section is about attributes: In some civilisations, women are expected to possess ideal attributes such as loving, nurturing, tenderness or softness, and submission, whereas men are expected to be strong, tough, self-confident, competitive, and rational. When it comes to roles and obligations, men are thought to be the heads of households, breadwinners, property owners, and those involved in politics, business, or professions. Women are expected and trained to care for their children, family members, the elderly, and all domestic chores. These positions vary greatly between men and women. And they vary over time and across cultures. Man sees himself as Subject and Absolute, whereas woman sees herself as the 'Other': according to de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*:

“She is referred to as "the sex," implying that she appears to the man as a sexual person. She is sex to him—absolute sex, no less,... She is the ancillary, the non-essential in contrast to the essential. She is the 'Other,' he is the Subject, he is the Absolute.”⁶ (p.44)

Socialist feminists argue that a society based on private property and class differences is the root cause of women's subordination. They believe it is vital to understand how society's class-based hierarchical sexual ordering works. These feminists believe that simply improving the economic system will not change the patriarchal attitude. Coordinating activities against patriarchy and capitalism at the same time would be essential. According to socialist feminists, women's lack of agency stems from four fundamental social mechanisms: sexuality, reproduction, production, and childrearing. Women's subjugation is exacerbated by familial structures. Sex roles are unequal and hierarchical, which has an impact on both families and businesses.

Representation of Gender in Media:

Gender representation in media refers to how various genders—particularly women, men, and non-binary people—are depicted in television, films, news, advertising, social media, and other types of media. These depictions are important because media has a major influence on how people perceive themselves and others, establishing beliefs, expectations, and societal standards. Traditionally, media has portrayed men as strong, independent, confident, and leaders, and women as caring, emotional, attractive, or dependent. These portrayals are based on gender stereotypes, which are oversimplified assumptions about how people of a particular gender should act. Despite recent improvements in media, similar trends persist. Women and non-binary individuals are frequently under-represented, particularly in leadership positions, science, politics, and action-oriented storylines. When they are portrayed, they may be sexualised or defined primarily by their physical appearance rather than their abilities. Men are sometimes portrayed as emotionally detached, which discourages healthy emotional expression. Gender representation in the media has a significant impact on public perceptions of identity, equality, and possibilities. More balanced and inclusive portrayals can contribute to a fairer society in which people feel seen, respected, and free to be themselves.

William Blackstone, a renowned professor of law at Oxford in the seventeenth century, defines marriage as a "civil death" for women. Millett cites his *Commentaries on the English Constitution* and *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, claiming that marriage unites husband and wife and that the legal existence of women is suspended during marriage or that her whole essence is absorbed by her husband. Everything she does must be done under her husband's supervision, protection, and care.⁷ (p.68)

Since the beginning of the women's movement, there has been a considerable growth in the amount of writing that is overtly feminist and promotes female equality. In order to determine the extent to which women's writings are comparable to and distinct from male literature, feminists have reignited their interest in researching early works by female authors and interpreting them in new ways. Feminist literature focusses mostly on women's ideas and feelings about their own lives. Feminists' primary goal is to centre women and place them in positions of leadership so that they can express their own voices, be heard and believed, and exercise authority over their

own lives and experiences. When one examines the history of writing, only men penned and expressed women's opinions. Feminists have paid close attention to a number of previous female writers in order to evaluate them from new perspectives and offer women a voice in literary history.

Prominent male advocate for women's rights. John Smart Mill has severe misgivings about several of the issues addressed by Wollstonecraft in *The Subjection of Women* (1869). He, like her, believes that women's dignity is dependent on higher earning capacity and superior education in all professions. Mill was a sincere democrat who battled for individual rights, and he was a liberty advocate. He referred to the system's subsequent enslavement of women as "domestic slavery." According to Mill, the most significant impediment to human development is the official servitude of one gender to the other, as well as the limiting of existing social ties between men and women.

Conclusion:

The concept of gender roles relates to the expectation that we act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves according to our assigned gender. The notion of public and private depicts social relations as divided into two distinct spheres. Individuals' activities in larger society, such as productive or paid work and participation in other public activities, define the public realm. On the other hand, the private realm is distinguished by acts carried out with specific others that are relatively free of state authority. It is the domain of the home, of personal or familial connections. Private and public also represent primary and secondary relationships, respectively. Most crucially, interest in the public-private dichotomy stems from the gendered character and gendered places, i.e. the identification of masculinity with public and femininity with private. Women are expected to remain in the private sphere whereas men function in both the public and the private. The gender division of work, or gender inequality, in a society is determined by its socio-cultural ideas about the nature and social worth of gender disparities in competences and attributes. Such assumed assumptions enable an individual to be reliably classified as male or female in all circumstances and considered as more or less suitable candidates for various tasks, responsibilities, and places in our society. For such cultural beliefs to remain, people's daily interactions must be structured to support them, such as through socialisation.

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