



7. The Social Construction of Gender in Society

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Abstract

Gender is a social characteristic of women, men, boys, and girls which is socially constructed; this includes behaviors, roles being a woman, men, boy, or girl. We live in a society where classification and categorizing have become parts of the essential needs for every individual to fit in the society. The construction of gender within the society is not something new but it has been the burning topic since the first wave of feminism. It is still being practiced as part of the tradition or culture by every parent and imparted to their childrens in terms of what to do and what not to do, depending on their biological functions. The representation of our gender in every aspect of our life is constructed by society. So, what is meant to be a boy or a girl in terms of our behaviors and roles fall under the specific gender constructed by society? To eliminate the system of gender classification based on sexual identity is something more complicated than we think and more importantly, the duty and performance of specific gender is something that will take some time to understand. We are in the transition period to adapt the ideas of gender equality with the revolution of the new education system and implement new courses like women's studies, Gender studies, social work, etc. The present review based paper deals with the issue of social construction of gender in society. The researcher collected the needed data from the various research articles, books, and research papers through secondary data analysis.

Keywords: Gender construction, Sexuality, gender society, feminism, new education system, gender expectation.

Introduction

Social construction is an invention of the society which classifies reality and is accepted by individuals. Social scientists believe that Gender is an achieved social status while Sex is an ascribed social status. The roles and behaviors of women are prescribed through the primary

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socialization process which takes place in the family where her parents condition the Do and Don'ts of behaviors in the given social settings. The Social Construction of gender starts from the familial institution where parents are the role models to future generations of the society. Gender is a social characteristic of women, men, boys, and girls which are socially constructed which include behaviors and roles. This study merely focuses on the specific classification of men and women respecting other's gender and understanding the performance of men and women assigned by society to understand the whole concept of gender from the ground level.

This research paper was carried out using the descriptive research method to conduct the present study. The various research materials were collected from the e- research journals and libraries. Then the data were analyzed by the systematic categorization method and described elaborately with subject to the research title.

The following are the objectives of the present study

- To examine how gender is constructed through culture.
- To analyze the difference between masculinity and femininity.
- To understand the concept of gender through the various feminist thinkers.
- To describe the various expected roles of gender in society.

Understanding the Gender: The Concept of the Sociological and Biological Approach

To understand the sociological concept of gender one must understand how socialists define gender. In everyday terminology, male/female and man/ woman are often conflated but refer to two things, sex, and gender. Sex is considered by the sociologist that it is a biological categorization by the reproductive organ. in which most people fall under the categorization of male, female, and some people who do not fit with the sex organ in the category. So sex is a biological classification based on body parts whereas Gender, it is a social category based on people's behaviors, identity, and interaction with others. Sociologist's concept of gender, views as learned behaviors and culturally constructed ones, so it is a social category.

To understand Gender, we can simplify the concept into three basic categories biological sex, Gender identity, and sexual orientation. Most people are confused with gender and biological sex which is referred to as biological traits that are determined by chromosomes, most people are born with XY as male and XX is female with some people being born intersex without typical XX or XY chromosome. For instance, a person may be born appearing as female but may have



male anatomy or a person may be born with the genital part between male or female, so biological sex is which determine male, female, or intersex while Gender identity is different. Gender identity is a social construct in which you are assigned by the time of your birth. People have put this arbitrary idea of gender onto virtually everything from colors, type of items of clothing, career path, etc. Masculine, blue, football, penis, etc. is considered masculine gender while breast, pink, barbie, and tears are considered female gender. Many consider that gender assignment is real, determined by birth but this gender is not determined by biological sex but they are ideas and concepts that many intend to accept on our sex. However, let's put simply that gender is how we see ourselves but remember biological sex are different than gender identity, the biological male is given the gender masculine of boy and biological female are given the feminine gender of girl and this is the assigned cultural practice of female or male at birth. Many people feel comfortable with their assigned gender and these people are considered cisgender and if one is comfortable with Cis-male or Cis-female their gender identity matches their biological sex but when someone feels uncomfortable with assigned gender and the biological sex they are called transgender. when a person who is assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman is called the trans woman and a person who is female at birth but identifies as a man is called transman.

The third component is called sexual orientation, sexual orientation itself is an entire spectrum of identities which does not determine by biological sex or gender identities. Sexual orientation is who you want to court and feel attracted to, while gender identity is how you see yourself. So, gender is not a lockbox that we find ourselves in, it is a spectrum that we all can move along or not identify at all.

The Construction of Gender

The social construction of gender becomes very clearly visible when one compares men and women in different norms of roles and participation in society across different cultures around the world. In western industrialization, many people tend to think that musculanity and femininity is a dichotomy that men and women are completely different and opposite. However, other cultures opposed this assumption with the view of distinction of masculinity and femininity. For example, in the Navajo culture called Berdaches, there is a category of people who were born normally as men anatomically but called the third gender. So what this suggests is that gender categorization is completely a process of socialization. This process begins even before they



were born, starting from the parenting pattern of selecting the gender names on the basis of biological sex, collecting toys on the basis of their sex, decorating the baby's room, buying clothes colors to reflect the cultural expectation of the society. We are manipulated by the socialization of parenting from family, religious leaders, educators, etc, who expect us to perform certain particular behaviors to fit inside the structural norm of representing our gender roles and gender identity. Forming of gender identity is one result of gender socialization in which an individual's definition of oneself is defined by male or female. Gender identity moulds us in how we think of others too and influences behaviors and expression of expected gender performance.

Sociological frameworks have their view of theories regarding gender and how it relates to the expectation of society. Functional sociologists view that men were expected to play instrumental roles and women expressive roles, as they view gender division of labor important for the smooth functioning of the society. However, these perspectives suggest that it encourages gender inequality between men and women to make choices about family and domestic work. Many socialists think that the functional approach is outdated and sexist as now there is plenty of scientific evidence to oppose the gender gap. Gender based wage earning was deeply embedded rather than choices of men and women in engaging with family work-balance. Gender assumption and gender bias leads to the empowerment of men and oppression of women in society, Sociologists view gender power as building the social structures which manifests all aspects of a patriarchal system. For example, wage inequalities between men and women result from men's power and dominance by devaluing the women's works that women labor provides. Feminist theorists view that creating inequalities and injustice based on gender can be re-described by focusing on structural forces, norms, world views, values, and everyday behaviors. Most importantly they believed that these social forces and structural norm of gender roles and gender expectation can also be created equal again.

We live in a world where we were supposed to perform our gender role assigned by society. One of the famous theories of gender comes from Judith Butler's "Gender Performativity" she says, it is something we perform stylized repetition of the act through repetition. Some people think that gender performativity can be performed in whatever gender we like and ultimately your gender is a means of self-expression, but Butler's explain that this is not the performance where an actor chooses to perform a role and reads from the scripts to perform. Butler's thinks that



some way of speaking is performativity, they don't just communicate but also constitute an act. Butler's thinks that one thing performativity can do is constitute an identity. The repeated stylized that make up our gender is not an expression of hidden self but they are self. Butler's says "Gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norm which one is constituted". If we break down the society into a simpler concept and look at the example of how the family members are supposed to performed their gender roles, the mother and daughter are expected to be softer in their nature and emotions than the father and son. Women are expected to be subservient to men and consider their decisions as final and best. Most of the children have lived and grown up from the spectrum where many parents considered that men are greater, better, and beneficial than women in society, the suppression and subordination of women in society is because they are physical weaker or because women show more emotional intelligence than men. Lavina Shiwani in her article "Superior:Men or Women" talks about the physical difference of men and women in strength, she writes that men are physically stronger than women but she argues that this does not imply that one is superior to others and women are far superior to men with regards to their immunity and that is why the new-born baby girl has the higher chances of surviving than a newborn boy. On the other hand, women have more emotional intelligence than men and that is women's brain has structure differently and this does not condone the idea of men cannot be a teacher or women cannot be engineers, every brain has its ability and regardless of their gender or sex.

Performing the Gender: Expectation and Behaviour assigned on our Sex Identity

Gender as a social institution is the process of creating social status, assignments, rights, and responsibilities as part of the social identity building. Gender inequality and social structure is based on the unequal status assigned by social construct . As a structural norm gender creates a social difference that defined men and women, individuals learn from the social interaction of what is expected to be and maintain gender roles. Gender interaction build gender roles in a family,workplace , and other institution which reinforces gender expectation. Because Gender is a process, there is not only room for modification and variation by an individual or small group but also for institutionalized change. (J.W . Scott, 1988,) We have to retrospect the system of our society which function as an administrator in deciding a gender roles and frames expectation to perform a gender role based on one's genital part.by looking. Butlers emphasize that our gender identity is not constructed by ourselves. She explains that the repeated stylized action



that makes up our gender taught itself and enforced it alone. She says, when a baby is born the performance of “it’s a boy” and “it’s a girl” happens and the baby can be expected to perform differently depending on the assigned gender identity. Simone de Beauvoir in her famous book *Feminist existentialism “The second sex”* emphasized at great length that those who are gender male are often expected to maintain very different identities from those who are gender female. Butler is not denying the existence of sexual difference, but she is interested in how some physical differences between people come to acquire such significance. According to Butler our gender identity is not an expression of anything in ourselves but it is our self. There are two big theories of what is gender and where it comes from. Gender essentialism explains that whatever it is to be a gender it is explained by biological sex chromosomes. On the other hand social constructivism says that your Gender is socially constructed. So, Butler’s theory of “performativism” plays a very crucial role in “social constructivist” because she thinks that all the gender identity, social rules, and expectation comes from the social norm.

Simone de Beauvoir in her book *“The Second Sex”* made a remarkable statement that “one is not born but rather become a woman” she explains that being a woman is not a natural fact, neither is their biology or psychology that define women, it is history that has constructed them. She says that behavior of femininity does not arise from biological or psychological differences, it is a construction of civilization and reflection of not essential differences in men and women but differences in their situation. Social situation determines characters not biology. Women are not born rather they grow into the roles and learn from the social norm of how to be a woman, from the expectation and rules enlisted by men to perform a certain character that was structure to be a woman in the society.

Julia Serano an American trans-bi activist and biologist says that gender performativism is in danger of patronizing to the theory of gender performance by the social norms because she thinks that for many people their gender expression feels right for them and it is the way of expressing something which is inside them. Serano’s thinks that both essentialism and social constructivism are incomplete. She says that people against what gender essentialism think that gender should be based on their sex chromosome far more frequently than the essentialists can count for. Essentialists say that people with exceptional gender expression (Male and Female) come down to anomalies but she argues that people with gender exceptional expressions are often displayed or develop their identity performance from an early age before any kind of social



conditioning could have set in. Serano is of the view that social constructivism is missing something as well and the missing idea, she thinks is “subconscious sex”. Subconscious sex is how your brain expects your body to be. Serano states that trans people are aware of their gender discomfort from a very young age when their subconscious sex does not match their physical body which they are assigned. Their gender is based on their physical bodies whereas Cis people on the other hand have subconscious sex that does not matter to their physical appearance and assigned gender therefore, they don’t experience any gender dysphoria. Serona believes that subconscious sex is a matter of how your brain is wired and thinks that social condition plays a huge role in how we interpret our subconscious sex (Serano, 2007).

When a girl is born, society plays a role in deciding her characters and behavior of how she should behave and perform her assigned gender. It is normally seen that in a family where women are given half a glass of milk, men are given a full glass. Men are fed a full plate of food with the concept of society that men are expected to be masculine and play their roles as the protector and be responsible for the family.

Roles of Gender in the Society, the Expectation of Men Roles and Women Roles

Gender roles are based on different groups, gender beliefs, and expectations from a different society. Gender roles are the reflection of human individual and their environment. Gender roles are defined according to a particular society’s differences in their sex. Most societies believe that women are more nurturing than men. So traditional ways of gender feminine roles are prescribed to nurture. Therefore women consider themselves as full time nurturers of their family without engaging themselves with work outside the home. From the view of traditional gender roles, the male is expected to be the head of the family, provide the needs of the family and support them financially. These gender roles were practiced in most domains of society. Many disciplines offered a different range of gender roles. Ecological perspective defined that gender roles are created by the interaction of individuals with their environment. The biological perspective suggests that women have more affinity towards gender roles and men have a natural affinity towards masculine gender roles. The sociological perspective towards gender roles suggests that gender roles are socially constructed and female and male roles are not necessarily connected to biological traits. Feminine and masculine roles are learned from society therefore sociologists believe that they can be unlearned as well and can be assigned new / different roles. Feminist ideas of gender roles are not only about the nature of men and women but it digs deeper into the



concept of the power of men in society for example; economic control in the family is one way by which men display their power over women in family. The feminist perspective is that men are likely not to lose power or social status even when their marriage is dissolved since men hold the power and are expected to be the breadwinners whereas women are considered to be nurturers of the family, committing themselves full time and left to poverty when the marriage is dissolved. Even in the 21st century, many corporate centers and offices operate from the ideas of traditional gender roles. After all, the position of work is segregated by sex like women are more like to be employed themselves as secretaries and men are expected more likely to work as executives or managers as men are presumed to be more orientated and focus on their work. Gender roles are created by the concept of gender stereotypes, they are oversimplifying to exaggerate the roles of males and females, common gender stereotypes about roles are, men are expected to be not emotional while women are considered to be being irrational and emotional. Those “gender stereotypes are like to be influenced by the rules and rituals that came from generation” (Blackstone, 2003).

Operationalization of Gender is a process of turning various gender-related abstract concepts into a particular pattern. There are four stages in this process consists of Primary socialization, Gendering (masculinity and femininity), Labelling behaviors, and assigning roles.

1. Primary Socialization

Primary Socialization is a process of learning that takes place in the early years of the child. It is the internalization of cultural values and norms which helps the children to identify good things and bad things.

2. Gendering

Next to the primary socialization stage, the individuals are classified in this stage into masculinity and femininity by their parents based on their genital system. In this stage, the children categorize themselves as superior and/or inferior to the opposite Gender.

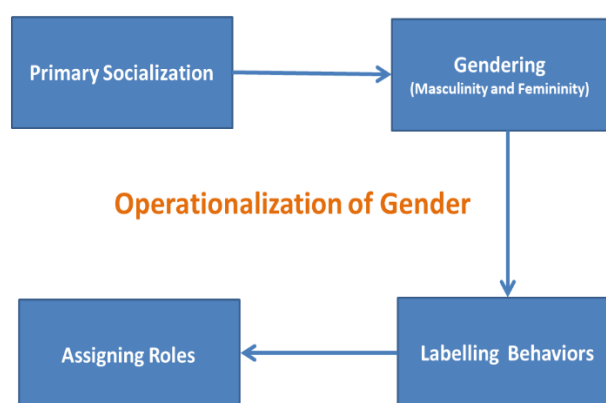
3. Labelling behaviors

After the gendering stage, the individual will be labelled with certain behaviours. Society has prescribed various behaviours to the individual based on their genders like strength, courage, independence, leadership, and assertiveness to Masculinity and humility, emotional, sensitive, expressive, empathetic, helpful traits to femininity.

4. Assigning Roles

Finally, the individuals will be assigned different roles based on their behaviours. Parents teach their children about their traits like getting a job, earning money, achievable goals or ambition for masculinity and nurturing behaviors, maintaining family, upbringing of children, religious practices, and cooking

Operationalization of Gender



Conclusion

Talking about gender and trying to understand it is not something that has jumped out from the mystery shell but is equivalent to fish talking about water. People find to believe that gender is created and re-created from human interaction, social life, and texture of social life. The Individuals are living in a society where they intended to participate or gendering in certain ways which were assigned by our sex during the time of our birth. Gender is much as object-subject that is shaped in the subject and acted by the person. Butler's theory of performativity emphasizes that the individuals are performing their gender and play their gender roles which can also not be really of them. They perform their gender roles which are assigned by society and follow the structure of certain behaviors as Simone Di Beauvoir said "one was not fully born but become a woman".

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