

Chapter 2: Gender Issues and Related Concepts: Definitions and Problems

2.1. Introduction

All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should be collectively rebellious to the power of men. They are so far in a position different from all other subject classes, that their masters require something more from them than actual service. Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments.

—John Stuart Mill, the Subjection of Women (1869)

All societies are structured around relatively stable patterns that establish how social interaction will be carried out. Status and role are the most important social structures that organize social interaction. **Status** is a category or position a person occupies that is a significant determinant of how she or he will be defined and treated. We acquire statuses by achievement, through our own efforts, or by ascription, being born into them or attaining them involuntarily at some other point in the life cycle. Compared to achieve statuses occurring later in life, ascribed statuses are those immediately impacting virtually every aspect of our lives. The most important ascribed statuses are gender, ethnicity, and social class. People whose status sets are comprised of low-ranked ascribed statuses more than high-ranked achieved statuses are near the bottom of the social stratification system and vulnerable to social stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. To date, there is no known society in which the status of female is consistently ranked higher than that of male.

Role is the expected behavior associated with a status. Roles are performed according to social norms, shared rules that guide people's behavior in specific situations. Social norms determine the privileges and responsibilities a status possesses. Females and males, mothers and fathers, and daughters and sons are all statuses with different normative role requirements

attached to them. The status of mother calls for expected roles involving love, nurturing, self-sacrifice, home-making, and availability. The status of father calls for expected roles of breadwinner, disciplinarian, home technology expert, and ultimate decision maker in the household. *All social interaction is gendered. Gendered social interaction is guided by status, positions people occupy, and roles, the behavior associated with a status.* Sexism (the belief that the status of female is inferior to the status of male) and discrimination result when the status and role of female and male become stereotyped.

Although women from all demographic categories contributed to these numbers, mothers with preschool children led the trek from unpaid home-based roles to full-time paid employment roles. In acting out the roles of mother and employee, women are expected to be available at given times to satisfy the needs of family and workplace. Because workplaces and other social institutions have not been modified in meaningful ways to account for the new statuses women occupy, their range of acceptable role behavior is severely restricted. As a result, family and workplace roles inevitably collide and compete with one another for the mother—employee's time and attention.

This chapter will introduce you with the basic terminologies related to gender issues. The basic concepts and definition includes gender, sex, gender equality, gender equity, gender role, sex role, gender disparities, violence and discrimination, other forms of gender based violence against women will be discussed.

Sex describes the biological differences between men and women, which are universal and determined at birth. It is the classification of people as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes,

hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitalia. It is related to males' and females' physiology and generally remains constant across cultures and over time.

Gender refers to those social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts. It refers to a culturally-defined set of economic, social, and political roles, responsibilities, rights, entitlements obligations, associated with being female and male, as well as the power relations between and among women and men, boys and girls. Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, attitudes, feelings and likely behaviors of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity.

Gender roles and expectations are learned or acquired during socialization as a member of a given community. Gender is an acquired identity. They can change over time and they vary within and between cultures. Systems of social differentiation such as political status, class, ethnicity, physical and mental disability, age and more, modify gender roles. Gender roles are socially determined and can be affected by factors such as education or economics. The concept of gender is vital because, applied to social analysis; it reveals how women's subordination (or men's domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever. *Sex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person is born with it, but gender is an achieved status because it must be learned.*

Gender Expression/Gender Image: The way in which a person presents oneself to the world, as either masculine or feminine within a given culture; for example, in terms of clothing, communication patterns, interests, posture, vocal inflection, and other behavior. A person's gender expression may or may not be consistent with socially prescribed gender roles, and may or may not reflect his or her gender identity.

Genderism: Holding people to traditional expectations based on gender, or punishing or excluding those who don't conform to traditional gender expectations.

Gender-neutral: Nondiscriminatory language to describe relationships—e.g. “spouse” and “partner” are gender-neutral alternatives to the gender-specific words “husband,” “wife,” “boyfriend” and “girlfriend.”

Gender Division of Labor is the result of how each society divides work among men and among women according to what is considered suitable or appropriate to each gender usually by tradition and custom. In feminist economics, the institutional rules, norms and practices which govern the allocation of tasks between men and women, girls and boys, also constitute the gender division of labor, which is seen as variable over time and space and constantly under negotiation. Unequal gender division of labor refers to a gender division of labor where there is an unequal gender division of reward. Discrimination against women in this sense means that women are likely to get most of the burden of labor, and most of the unpaid labor, whereas men collect most of the income and rewards resulting from the labor. In many countries, the most obvious pattern in the gender division of labor is that women are mostly confined to unpaid domestic work and unpaid food production, while men dominate in cash crop production and wage employment.

Gender Role refers to the expected attitudes and behaviors a society associates with each sex. This definition places gender squarely in the sociocultural context. It refers to how “masculine” or “feminine” an individual acts. Societies commonly have norms regarding how males and females should behave, expecting people to have personality characteristics and/or act a certain way based on their biological sex. Gender roles are learned behaviors in a given society/community, or other special group, that condition which activities, tasks and responsibilities are perceived as male and female. Gender roles are affected by age, class, race, ethnicity, religion and by the geographical, economic and political environment. Changes in gender roles often occur in response to changing economic, natural or political circumstances, including development efforts. Both men and women play multiple roles in society. The gender roles of women can be identified as reproductive, productive and community managing roles, while men’s are categorized as either productive or community politics. Men are able to focus on a particular productive role, and play their multiple roles sequentially. Women, in contrast to men, must play their roles simultaneously, and balance competing claims on time for each of them.

- *Productive roles*: Refer to the activities carried out by men and women in order to produce goods and services either for sale, exchange, or to meet the subsistence needs of the family. For example in agriculture, productive activities include plating, animal husbandry and gardening that refers to farmers themselves, or for other people at employees.

- *Reproductive roles*: Refer to the activities needed to ensure the reproduction of society's labor force. This includes child bearing, rearing, and care for family members such as children, elderly and workers. These tasks are done mostly by women.

- *Community managing role*: Activities undertaken primarily by women at the community level, as an extension of their reproductive role, to ensure the provision and maintenance of scarce resources of collective consumption such as water, health care and education. This is voluntary unpaid work undertaken in 'free' time.

- *Community politics role*: Activities undertaken primarily by men at the community level, organizing at the formal political level, often within the framework of national politics. This work is usually undertaken by men and may be paid directly or result in increased power and status.

- *Triple role/multiple burden*: These terms refer to the fact that women tend to work longer and more fragmented days than men as they are usually involved in three different gender roles-reproductive, productive and community work.

Sex Role refers to the behaviors and expectations of male and female as a result of their biological differences/sex. For example, females give birth.

Gender Equality is the state or condition that affords women and men equal enjoyment of human rights, freedoms, conditions, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources for realizing their full potential and for contributing to and benefiting from economic, social, cultural, and political development. It means society values males and females equally for their similarities and differences and the diverse roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society. It signifies the long-term outcomes that result from gender equity strategies and processes. Equity strategies refer to the processes used to achieve gender equality. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.

Gender Equity involves fairness in representation, participation, and benefits afforded to males and females. The goal is that both groups have a fair chance of having their needs met and that they have equal access to opportunities for realizing their full potential as human beings. To ensure fairness, measures must be taken to compensate for cumulative historical economic, social, and political disadvantages that prevent women and men, boys and girls from operating on a level playing field.

Gender Dynamics refers to the relationships and interactions between and among boys, girls, women, and men. Gender dynamics are informed by socio-cultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Depending upon how they are manifested, gender dynamics can reinforce or challenge existing norms.

Feminism: Feminism is a movement for social, cultural, political and economic equality of women and men. It is a campaign against gender inequalities and it strives for equal rights for women. Feminism can be also defined as the right to enough information available to every single woman so that she can make a choice to live a life which is not discriminatory and which works within the principles of social, cultural, political and economic equality and independence. Feminism can be also defined as a global phenomenon which addresses various issues related to women across the world in a specific manner as applicable to a particular culture or society. Though the issues related to feminism may differ for different societies and culture but they are broadly tied together with the underlying philosophy of achieving equality of gender in every sphere of life. So feminism cannot be tied to any narrow definitions based on a particular class, race or religion. *Feminist theory* is an examination of women's positions in society, based on the belief that current positions are unequal and unjust, which also provides tactics and criteria for change.

Gender Stereotypes: are the patterns or mental templates for what we expect members of each sex to be. For instance, the stereotype for males frequently includes being tall, muscular, hirsute, solitary, and impassive. For females it might include being small, weak, social, sensitive, and emotional.

Gender Disparities refers to the difference or among men and women measured in terms of different socio-economic considerations. There is considerable evidence that, by and large, the average achievements of women in consumption, health and education are lower than those of men. Gender inequality hurts all members of society, not just girls and women.”

Gender Discrimination: The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), approved by the United Nations in 1979, states that “Discrimination against women shall mean distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field”. It refers to any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms, which prevents a person from enjoying full human rights.

Systemic Discrimination: Systemic discrimination is caused by policies and practices that are built into the ways that institutions operate, and that have the effect of excluding women and minorities. For example, in societies where the belief is strong that whatever happens within the household is the concern of household member only, the police force and judiciary, organizations within the institution of the state are likely routinely to avoid addressing questions

of domestic violence, leading to systemic discrimination against all the women who experience violence within the home.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV), in the broadest terms, is violence that is directed at individuals based on their biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to culturally-defined expectations of what it means to be a woman and man, girl and boy. GBV is rooted in economic, social, and political inequalities between men and women. GBV can occur throughout the lifecycle, from infancy through childhood and adolescence, the reproductive years and into old age, and can affect women and girls, and men and boys. Specific types of GBV include (but are not limited to) female infanticide; wife-battering, early and forced marriage, and female genital cutting/mutilation; child sexual abuse and exploitation; enforced prostitution, pornography, trafficking in persons; sexual coercion, harassment and abuse; neglect; domestic violence; economic deprivation, and elder abuse.

Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, defines the term “violence against women” as: “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Three contexts of violence are differentiated in Article 2: Family, community and state. The forms shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family: wife-battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, and female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.

b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community: rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work and education institutions, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Domestic Violence: a pattern of abusive and threatening behaviors that may include physical, emotional, economic and sexual violence as well as intimidation, isolation and coercion. The purpose of domestic violence is to establish and exert power and control over another; men most often use it against their intimate partners, such as current or former spouses, girlfriends, or dating partners. Forms of domestic violence can include physical violence, sexual violence, economic control, and psychological assault (including threats of violence and physical harm, attacks against property or pets and other acts of intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, and use of the children as a means of control).