



## A Sociological view on Sex and Gender

### KEYWORDS

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#### Introduction:

Sociologists make a distinction between gender and sex. Gender is the perceived or projected component of human sexuality while sex is the biological or genetic component. Why do sociologists differentiate between gender and sex? Differentiating gender from sex allows social scientists to study influences on sexuality. Without confusing the social and psychological aspects with the biological and genetic aspects, gender is a social construction.

#### Sex And Gender:

Sex is separate from gender this term refers to the cluster of biological, chromosomal and anatomical features associated with maleness and femaleness in the human body. Sexual dimorphism is often thought to be a concrete reality, whereas in reality the existence of intersex people points to a multiplicity of sexes in the human population, common categories of sex being male, female and Intersex. However, the traditional way of conceptualizing sex is in the framework of male female binary. The more accurate way of understanding sex is a spectrum of biological chromosomal and anatomical features.

Gender is a complicated set of socio-cultural practices where by human bodies are transformed into 'men' and 'women', gender refers to that which a society deems 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Gender identity refers to an individual self-identification as a man, woman, transgendered or other identity category. Most contemporary definitions stress how gender is socially and culturally produced and constructed as opposed to being a fixed static coherent essence. The common categories of gender are men, woman, transgender and traditional way of conceptualizing gender is a man and woman binary and more accurate way of understanding gender is a spectrum of constellation of different behaviours, attributes and identifications.

#### Doing Gender:

In their classic article "Doing Gender", Sociologist West and Zimmerman (1987) conceptualized gender as "a routine accomplishment embedded in every day interaction". Philosopher Judith Butler (1990) also constructed gender as a performance, gender proves to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing. Butler argued that individuals could choose to perform different genders at different times, so one is not a singled fixed gender, instead gender is merely something that one does. Denmark (2005) Zimmerman (1987), Matlin (2008) Corber and Moore (2007), Golden (2008) and different other authors have offered numerous definitions of sex and gender. There are some consistencies among them. They all constructed sex and gender as somehow related to people and that society labels as female or male. Most constructed gender as more related to cultural influences and sex as more related to biology.

#### Conceptualizing sex And Gender:

Conceptualizing sex accurately is important because of the great influence it has on health. This has been foregrounded by the health practitioners. Sociologists too have sought to examine these differences to explore the relationship between sex and gender. There are many sex-linked differences in the development of disease such as coronary heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, and lung cancer, but the causal mechanism that accounts for these differences conceptualize sex more precisely. Our knowledge and understanding of sex has changed as we have come to appreciate the great diversity that exists within population, for example previous conceptions of sex assumed chromosomal arrangement XX and XY as the typical make-up for women and men, respectively while we now understand that chromosomal configurations XXX, XXY, XYY and XO exist as well as XX males and XY females.

While we often like to think of sex as biological and gender as social, both concepts are socially constructed and therefore subject to change over time. The ways we perceive the categories male, female, intersex and others are not biologically inherent and fixed, but relative to place and time. Different cultures conceptualise sex variation in different ways and our understanding of sex has changed over time as biological variation is discovered and measurement techniques are refined. Conceptualizing sex as a changing and fluid multidimensional construct ensures that these types of important biological variation are captured in research, ensuring that the needs of all individuals are considered, comprehensive conceptualizing of sex are also essential for ensuring that more accurate and rigorous science gets carried out in order to identify the causes and importance of sex-related differences across the continuum.

A central theme in gender analysis is the recognition that the role of women and men are largely socially rather than biologically determined. This recognition has inspired a resurgence in empirical field research to causing particularly on the socially defined roles of women in rural societies in Africa, Asia, India and elsewhere specifically, a great deal of useful work has been done in relation to the very different roles of women and men in various farms, non-farm, food preparation, household maintenance and child care activities. These studies have convincingly demonstrated that women and men are faced by differential access to new technology, education, healthcare and other resources. Finally a number of studies have highlighted the fact that women and men will generally also differ greatly in terms of the value and nature of land, water and other assets over which they have ownership and use rights. The findings of these various studies have in turn 'fed back' and informed useful refinements in the way in which gender is conceptualized generally. Thorne (1980) observes

that conceptualizing gender as role makes it difficult to assess its influence on other role and reduces its explanatory usefulness in discussion of power and inequality.

#### **Institutionalized Gender:**

Gender is both produced and shaped by institutions such as the media, religion and educational, medical and other political and social systems, creating a societal gender structure that is deeply entrenched and rarely questioned but hugely influential. Institutionalized gender refers to the ways that gender is rooted in and expressed through these large social systems, through the different responses, values, expectations, rules, and responsibilities given to individual and groups according to gender (Johnson E T al,2007). For example, women are often paid less than men for similar work, and workplaces are often gendered, with certain departments and even entire occupations dominated by a particular gender. While gender is context-specific and subject to change, in almost every society in the world, men are more highly regarded than women and given greater power, access, money, opportunities, and presence in public life. The fact that these differences exist on such a large scale, points to the embeddedness of institutionalised gender. Institutionalised gender also interacts with systems related to race, classes, sexual identity, and other social constructs to further organise individuals and groups into hierarchy of privilege.

#### **Gender Role:**

Generally we said that gender role can be described as social norms or rules and standardised and that dictates different interests, responsibilities, opportunities, limitations and behaviours for men and women. But sociologists explain gender roles according to several theoretical perspectives, and general ways of understanding social reality that guide the research process and provide a means for interpreting the data.

Sociological perspectives on gender also vary according to the level of analysis at which they operate. Macro sociological perspectives on gender roles direct attention to data collected on large scale social phenomena, such as labour force, educational, and political trends that are differentiated according to gender roles. Micro sociological perspectives on gender roles direct attention to data collected in small groups and the details of gender interaction occurring, for example between couples and in families and peer groups. Micro sociological perspectives overlap a great deal with the discipline of social psychology.

#### **THE OTHERS (LGBT)**

The existing research dominates in exploring the sex-gender dimension in binaries, i.e. man versus woman categories. However, the new social movements that have marked the later half of the 20th century and the recent times aim at securing acknowledgement of the 'Other category' apart from the dominant two. Henceforth, increasing discourses on the categories as Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender and Intersex have come up which now is bringing a change in the perception of gender as several categories. This development, more characteristic of the post modern period seeks to acknowledge the rights of the LGBT which so far has not been acknowledged in mainstream discourses. Such concerted movements have led to the change in the policies of states in certain parts of the world, but not everywhere. Netherlands leads such countries which have legalised the rights of such gender groups. Even, the supposedly, most advanced nation

of the world, USA has not legalised marital rights of the LGBT across all its states. Although other rights as of suffrage, health are provided as being citizens yet the general social climate of perception is not yet conducive of equal treatment of the LGBT.

Even in India, the largest democracy in the world, such marital rights that are provided to the heterosexuals are not made legally available to the persons concerned. Apart from this, the general perception of the common people is of disdain towards these people who are treated and perceived as 'abnormal'.

#### **Reducing Gender Differences**

Structural approaches argue that gendered behaviour and the perception of gender difference grow out of the different social locations occupied by men and women. Women act like women because the positions they occupy require feminine behaviour. Men act like men because the social positions they occupy require competence, leadership, physical strength, and autonomy, presumably, then, change that results in more gender similarity in social location should reduce gender difference and the perception of difference, undoing gender refer to social interaction that reduce gender difference. Undoing gender evokes resistances in different contexts, however, gender bias seems to have reduced. Educated working couples living in nuclear families do sometimes take independent decisions that are girl child-friendly. Some change is perceptible in sites where the gender gap in education has narrowed and where educated women have higher aspiration for their daughters, which are not limited to fulfilling marriage requirements alone. In such cases families educate their daughters and sons equally, care for their health needs, and are not averse to the idea of daughters being employed before marriage. Female agency is more visible in such families in decision making processes and the parameters for decision making are set by both husband and wife.

Thus, social change in favour of the girl child has to impact the society and the family, not merely women alone. A change in structural factors such as equal property rights and equality in other intergenerational transfers would then interact with narrowing of the gender gap to produce equal life chances for girls.

#### **Conclusion**

Sex and gender are both important and mutually reinforcing concepts both biological and social influences the suggestions that gender may be independent for sex, play a role in producing gender differentiation and stratification and historically biological factors – particularly women's role in reproduction and to a lesser degree men's greater physical strength have constrained the division of labour. Understanding social influences on gender roles and attitude requires that social scientists distinguish between processes operating at the macro and micro levels.

Gender in the society is a constructed component of human sexuality, gender is an inner feeling that you are male, female, both, neither, or somewhere in between. Perhaps the best way to understand gender is to comprehend it as a process of presentation. Because gender role are delineated by behavioural expectation and norms, once individuals know those expectations, and norms, the individual can adopt behaviours that project the gender he/she wishes to portray. One can think of gender like a role in a theoretical play; there are specific behaviours and norms

associated with gender just like there are lines and movements associated with each character in a play. Gender role are unlike sex, are mutable, meaning they can change gender is not however as simple as just choosing a role to play but is also influenced by parents, culture, and society.

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