

INTRODUCTION TO GENDER

Dr. Anamika Gurung

CONCEPT OF GENDER

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 and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender roles and expectations are learned. 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. 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.

The concept of gender needs to be understood clearly as a cross-cutting sociocultural variable. It is an overarching variable in the sense that gender can also be applied to all other cross-cutting variables such as race, class, age, ethnic group, etc. Gender systems are established in different socio-cultural contexts which determine what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman/man and girl/boy in these specific contexts. Gender roles are learned through socialization processes; they are not fixed but are changeable. Gender systems are institutionalized through education systems, political and economic systems, legislation, and culture and traditions. In utilizing a gender approach the focus is not on individual women and men but on the system which determines gender roles / responsibilities, access to and control over resources, and decision-making potentials. The gender concept implies:

- A rejection of the underlying biological distinction in the word "sex" and in the expression "sexual inequality", which appears as "an ideological alibi for maintaining domination, the alibi of nature". Women are no more part of nature and no less part of culture than men;
- Grouping together all the differences identified between men and women, be they individual differences, differences in social roles or cultural representations, i.e., the grouping together of all that is variable and socially determined;

- The non-homogenous nature of the category of women, which is transcended by differences of class, ethnicity and age;
- The basic asymmetry and hierarchy between both groups, sexes and genders - one of them dominating and the other dominated - which is the basis of male power.

Related terminology and concepts include:

Gender roles: The particular economic, political and social roles and responsibilities that are considered appropriate for men and women in a culture.

Gender equality: The absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in authority, opportunities, allocation of resources or benefits, and access to services.

Gender equity: The process of being fair to women and men. Sometimes this involves measures to redress historical disadvantages that have prevented men and women from having equal access to rights and privileges. Equity leads to equality. Gender equity also implies that health needs, which are specific to each gender, receive appropriate resources

Gender awareness: Understanding that there are socially determined differences between men and women, and that these influence access to and control of resources.

Gender Sensitivity: The ability to perceive existing gender differences and issues, and to incorporate these into strategies and actions. Contrast with gender blindness.

Gender analysis: Identifies the inequalities that arise from the different roles of men and women, and analyzes the consequences of these inequalities for their lives, health and well-being.

abusive relationship

Gender Mainstreaming: The process used to ensure that women's and men's concerns and experiences are integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all legislation, policies and programmes.

Gender Parity: A numerical concept concerned with the relative equality in terms of numbers and proportions of women, men, girls and boys. In education, this means that the same number of boys and girls receive educational services at different levels and in diverse forms.

Definition of Gender:

Gender is defined by FAO as 'the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and

often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution' (FAO, 1997). Gender has been defined as: "The commonly shared expectations and norms within a society about appropriate male and female behavior, characteristics and roles. Gender can be considered a social and cultural construct that differentiates females from males and thus defines the ways in which females and males interact with each other. These roles and expectations are learned and they can change over time as well as vary within and between cultures.

Third gender: is a concept in which an individual are categorized ,either by themselves or by the society as neither man nor female. In third gender people there are many genetic disorders in which sex chromosomes are either missing or redundant (for example xyy) and birth defects can occur in which infants are born with ambiguous genitalia.

'Transgender' is an umbrella term referring to people who do not conform to culturally defined traditional gender roles associated with their biological sex. Transsexual is the term historically used by the psychiatric community to diagnose people who feel their biological body doesn't match with their sense of self or gender identity. Transsexual people are genetic males or females but believe that they are members of the other sex. They feel "trapped" in a wrong body hence they may undergo Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) to conform to their gender identity. Transgender is a more inclusive term to describe people who have a specific way of expressing or describing their gender identities. "The concept of "transgender" is used as an umbrella term to describe individuals whose gender identity or expression does not conform to the conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity. Transgender people perform specific social rites and functions in diverse cultures. For instance, hijra community in India, Xanith of the Arab state of Oman and mahus of Tahiti. Hijra community in India performs certain cultural roles and they often think of themselves more as females. Though hijras have defined gender roles in Indian culture which legitimizes their function as rituals performers, they are one of the most marginalized communities in India. They are often harassed and mocked and lack access to education and employment. With policy interventions in India, perception of people towards transgender community is slowly changing and transformations are seen regarding their access to education and decent work. Let us briefly read the story of Manobi Bandyopadhyay who is the first trans-gender person to become the college principal at Krishnagar Women's College in West Bengal.

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Teaching transgender as a concept will help us more to explore gender constructions beyond the binary category of male/female. Transgender communities and their lives are as diverse and heterogeneous as other social categories.

Types of Gender Identity

Gender identity is how a person feels and who they know them self to be when it comes to their gender. There are more than two genders, even though in our society the genders that are most recognised are male and female (called the gender binary) and usually are based on someone's anatomy (the genitals they were born with). This is gender assignment and it is based on the assumption that someone's genitals match their gender. However, gender is not about someone's anatomy, it is about who they know them self to be. There are many different gender identities. The following terminology helps us understand the diversity of gender identity.

L:Lesbian G:Gay B:Bisexual T:Transgender Q:Queer or Questioning

People often use LGBTQ+ to mean all of the communities included in the “LGBTQQIAA”:

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, 2/Two-Spirit, Queer, Questioning, Intersex Asexual, Ally, Pansexual, Agender, Gender Queer, Bigender, Gender Variant, Pangender

LGBTQ is the more commonly used term in the community; possibly because it is more user friendly! You may also hear the terms “Queer Community” or “Rainbow Community” used to describe LGBTQ2+ people. This initialism and the various terms are always evolving so don't try to memorize the list. The most important thing is to be respectful and use the terms that people prefer.

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Lesbian: A lesbian is a female homosexual: a female who experiences romantic love or sexual attraction to other females.

Gay: Gay is a term that primarily refers to a homosexual person or the trait of being homosexual. Gay is often used to describe homosexual males but lesbians may also be referred to as gay.

Bisexual: Bisexuality is romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behavior toward both males and females, or romantic or sexual attraction to people of any sex or gender identity; this latter aspect is sometimes termed pansexuality.

Transgender: Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. It is sometimes abbreviated to trans.

Transsexual: experience a gender identity inconsistent or not culturally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth

Two-Spirit: Two-Spirit is a modern umbrella term used by some indigenous North Americans to describe gender-variant individuals in their communities, specifically people within indigenous communities who are seen as having both male and female spirits within them.

Queer: Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual or cisgender. Queer was originally used pejoratively against those with same-sex desires but, beginning in the late-1980s, queer scholars and activists began to reclaim the word.

Questioning: The questioning of one's gender, sexual identity, sexual orientation, or all three is a process of exploration by people who may be unsure, still exploring, and concerned about applying a social label to themselves for various reasons.

Intersex : Intersex is a variation in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, or genitals that do not allow an individual to be distinctly identified as male or female..

Asexual: Asexuality (or nonsexuality) is the lack of sexual attraction to anyone, or low or absent interest in sexual activity. It may be considered the lack of a sexual orientation, or one of the variations thereof, alongside heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality.

Ally : An Ally is a person who considers themselves a friend to the LGBTQ+ community.

Pansexual: Pansexuality , or omnisexuality, is sexual attraction, romantic love, or emotional attraction toward people of any sex or gender identity. Pansexual people may refer to themselves as gender-blind, asserting that gender and sex are insignificant or irrelevant in determining whether they will be sexually attracted to others.

Agender : Agender people, also called genderless, genderfree, non-gendered, or ungendered people are those who identify as having no gender or being without any gender identity. This category includes a very broad range of identities which do not conform to traditional gender norms.

Gender Queer: Gender Queer is an umbrella term for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine—identities which are thus outside of the gender binary and cisnormativity.

Bigender: Bigender is a gender identity where the person moves between feminine and masculine gender identities and behaviours, possibly depending on context. Some bigender individuals express two distinct “female” and “male” personas, feminine and masculine respectively; others find that they identify as two genders simultaneously.

Gender Variant: Gender variance, or gender nonconformity, is behaviour or gender expression by an individual that does not match masculine and feminine gender norms. People who exhibit gender variance may be called gender variant, gender non-conforming, gender diverse or gender atypical, and may be transgender, or otherwise variant in their gender expression. Some intersex people may also exhibit gender variance.

Pangender : Pangender people are those who feel they identify as all genders. The term has a great deal of overlap with gender queer. Because of its all-encompassing nature, presentation and pronoun usage varies between different people who identify as pangender.

Difference between Gender and Sex

The terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are closely linked, yet they are not synonyms. Robert Stoller, in the 1960s, has drawn the distinction between them. He suggested that the word ‘sex’ be used to refer to the physical differences between men and women, while the term ‘gender’ be used in connection to the behaviour and cultural practices of men and women.

Sex: ‘Sex’ refers to the biological characteristics or natural biological differences between men and women, for example, the differences in the organs related to reproduction. A person’s sex is biologically determined as female or male according to certain identifiable physical features which are fixed. Women’s marginalisation has often been seen as ‘natural’ and a fact of their biology.

Gender: Gender refers to the cultural, socially constructed differences between the two sexes. It refers to the way society encourages and teaches the two sexes to behave in

different through socialization. 'Gender' and the hierarchical power relations between women and men based on this are socially constructed, and not derived directly from biology. Gender identities and associated expectations of roles and responsibilities are therefore changeable between and within cultures. Gendered power relations permeate social institutions so that gender is never absent. The following are difference between sex and gender with respects to some attributes.

Difference between Sex and Gender

Attributes	Sex (Biological Difference)	Gender (Social Difference)
Definition	Biological or cosmological difference	Social not natural difference
Meaning	Refers to physiological characteristics	Refers social, cultural expectations and actions
Aspect of Change	Difficult to change the sex when born as male or female	Can be changed since gender identity is determined by society
Aspect of role	Throughout history and across cultures, sex differences exist.	At different times in history and in different societies, gender roles are different.
. Aspect of policy	Policies respond to sex differences in areas to do with the physical body.	Policies can respond to gender stereotype and traditional gender roles.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER:

Social Construction of Gender The idea that gender difference is socially constructed is a view present in many philosophical and sociological theories about gender. According to this view, society and culture create gender roles, and these roles are prescribed as ideal or appropriate behavior for a person of that specific gender. Some argue that the differences in behavior between men and women are entirely social conventions, whereas others believe that behavior is influenced by biological universal factors to some extent, with social conventions having a major effect on gendered behavior. The following are the some of the social constructions of gender.

Gender-based harassment: Girls are expected to conform to stereotypical gendered appearances, as are boys. Both male and female students regularly take part in policing gender boundaries through bullying. Male students frequently harass male and female students, while female students generally only harass other female students. The practice of male students bullying other male students is explicitly linked to 'machismo' that boys are expected to subscribe to in order to be constructed and related to as 'normal' boys. Many girls report that boys tease and ridicule them on the basis of their appearance, which is linked to boys asserting masculine power through sexist practices of denigrating girls. This also serves to perpetuate the idea that appearance is a female's most important asset. The way in which girls harass other girls is through gossiping, instead of confronting the other girls directly. Unique appearances and attempts to stand out among girls are regarded very negatively. This type of female on female bullying sets the standard for appearance norms and the importance of appearance for females.

Adolescent view of adulthood: Gender is a cultural construction which creates an environment where an adolescent's performance in high school is related to their life goals and expectations. Because most young women know they want to be mothers and wives, the choice of professions and future goals can be inherently flawed by the gender constraints. Because a girl may want to be a mother later, her academics in high school can create clear gender differences because "higher occupational expectations, educational expectations, and academic grades were more strongly associated with the expected age of parenthood for girls than for boys".

Depression: High school continues to become a higher-pressure environment with academic and social triggers increasing the expectations of adolescents. High school is a large transitional period for teenagers causing them to "cope with these various transitions in different ways; some negotiate the passages easily whereas others develop serious behavioral and psychological problems". One of these psychological problems is depression. While the environment of high school can be stressful biological functions also play a large role in psychological well-being. Depression can be isolating, and without proper academics and societal support, high school can be challenging. Along with higher rates of self-esteem issues in adolescents, this can adversely affect girls' academics and social life in high school.

Body image: There are many different factors that affect body image, "including sex, media, parental relationship, and puberty as well as weight and popularity". The

intersectionality of these factors causes unique experiences for adolescents during this period within their lives. As their body changes, so does the environment in which they live in. Body image is closely linked to psychological during adolescence and can cause harmful effects when a child has body dissatisfaction.

Education: Due to the amount of time that children spend in school, "teachers are influential role models for many aspects of children's educational experiences, including gender socialization". Teachers who endorse the culturally dominant gender-role stereotype regarding the distribution of talent between males and females distort their perception of their students' mathematical abilities and effort resources in mathematics, in a manner that is consistent with their gender-role stereotype and to a greater extent than teachers who do not endorse the stereotype.

Social construction of gender explains cultural constructions of various roles that are played by women and men in the society. According to this view, gender roles are created by society and these roles are prescribed as ideal or appropriate behaviour of a person of that specific gender. Social construction of gender explains the structural relationships of inequality that exists between women and men as it is reflected in various aspects of life such as household, labour market, education and political institutions for e.g women's association with housework and men's proximity with public work are the product of social cultural context. Social expectations of women as natural mothers, wives, daughters and home makers not only exist at the ideological level but also operate at the material environment.

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