10.10: Gender Inequality

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles. Gender systems are often dichotomous and hierarchical; gender binary systems may reflect the inequalities that manifest in numerous dimensions of daily life. Gender inequality stems from distinctions, whether empirically grounded or socially constructed.

Gender Roles in Parenting and Marriage

Sigmund Freud suggested that biology determines gender identity through identification with either the mother or father. While some might agree with Freud, others argue that the development of the gendered self is not completely determined by biology, but rather the interactions that one has with the primary caregiver(s).

According to the non-Freudian view, gender roles develop through internalization and identification during childhood. From birth, parents interact differently with children depending on their sex, and through this interaction parents can instill different values or traits in their children on the basis of what is normative for their sex. This internalization of gender norms can be seen through the example of which types of toys parents typically give to their children ("feminine" toys such as dolls often reinforce interaction, nurturing, and closeness, "masculine" toys such as cars or fake guns often reinforce independence, competitiveness, and aggression). Education also plays an integral role in the creation of gender norms.

In Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters, Meg Meeker emphasizes the importance of opposite-gender parental roles. She claims "fathers, more than anyone else, set the course for a daughter's life."

Gender roles permeate throughout life and help to structure parenting and marriage, especially in relation to work in and
outside the home.

**Gender Inequality in Relationships**

Gender equality in relationships has been growing over the years but for the majority of relationships, the power lies with the male.\(^{[34]}\) Even now men and women present themselves as divided along gender lines. A study done by Szymanowicz and Furnham, looked at the cultural stereotypes of intelligence in men and women, showing the gender inequality in self-presentation.\(^{[35]}\) This study showed that females thought if they revealed their intelligence to a potential partner, then it would diminish their chance with him. Men however would much more readily discuss their own intelligence with a potential partner. Also, women are aware of people’s negative reactions to IQ, so they limit its disclosure to only trusted friends. Females would disclose IQ more often than men with the expectation that a true friend would respond in a positive way. Intelligence continues to be viewed as a more masculine trait, than feminine trait. The article suggested that men might think women with a high IQ would lack traits that were desirable in a mate such as warmth, nurturance, sensitivity, or kindness. Another discovery was that females thought that friends should be told about one’s IQ more so than males. However, males expressed doubts about the test’s reliability and the importance of IQ in real life more so than women. The inequality is highlighted when a couple starts to decide who is in charge of family issues and who is primarily responsible for earning income. For example, in Londa Schiebinger’s book, “Has Feminism Changed Science?”, she claims that “Married men with families on average earn more money, live longer, and progress faster in their careers,” while “for a working woman, a family is a liability, extra baggage threatening to drag down her career.”\(^{[36]}\) Furthermore, statistics had shown that “only 17 percent of the women who are full professors of engineering have children, while 82 percent of the men do.”\(^{[37]}\)

**Attempts in Equalizing Household Work**

Despite the increase in women in the labor force since the mid-1900s, traditional gender roles are still prevalent in American society. Women may be expected to put their educational and career goals on hold in order to raise children, while their husbands work. However, women who choose to work as well as fulfill a perceived gender role of cleaning the house and taking care of the children. Despite the fact that different households may divide chores more evenly, there is evidence that supports that women have retained the primary caregiver role within familial life despite contributions economically. This evidence suggest that women who work outside the home often put an extra 18 hours a week doing household or childcare related chores as opposed to men who average 12 minutes a day in childcare activities.\(^{[38]}\) One study by van Hooff showed that modern couples, do not necessarily purposefully divide things like household chores along gender lines, but instead may rationalize it and make excuses.\(^{[34]}\) One excuse used is that women are more competent at household chores and have more motivation to do them. Another is that some say the demands of the males’ jobs is higher.

**Gender Inequalities in Relation to Technology**

One survey showed that men rate their technological skills in activities such as basic computer functions and online participatory communication higher than women. However, it should be noted that this study was a self-reporting study, where men evaluate themselves on their own perceived capabilities. It thus is not data based on actual ability, but
merely perceived ability, as participants’ ability was not assessed. Additionally, this study is inevitably subject to the significant bias associated with self-reported data.\[39\]

### Structural Marginalization

Gender inequalities often stem from social structures that have institutionalized conceptions of gender differences.

Marginalization occurs on an individual level when someone feels as if they are on the fringes or margins of their respective society. This is a social process and displays how current policies in place can affect people. For example, media advertisements display young girls with easy bake ovens (promoting being a housewife) as well as with dolls that they can feed and change the diaper of (promoting being a mother).

### Gender Stereotypes

Cultural stereotypes are engrained in both men and women and these stereotypes are a possible explanation for gender inequality and the resulting gendered wage disparity. Women have traditionally been viewed as being caring and nurturing and are designated to occupations which require such skills. While these skills are culturally valued, they were typically associated with domesticity, so occupations requiring these same skills are not economically valued. Men have traditionally been viewed as the breadwinner or the worker, so jobs held by men have been historically economically valued and occupations predominated by men continue to be economically valued and earn higher wages.\[9\]

### Biological Fertilization Stereotypes

Bonnie Spanier coined the term hereditary inequality.\[40\] Her opinion is that some scientific publications depict human fertilization such that sperms seem to actively compete for the “passive” egg, even though in reality it is complicated (e.g. the egg has specific active membrane proteins that select sperm etc.)

### Sexism and Discrimination

Gender inequality can further be understood through the mechanisms of sexism. Discrimination takes place in this manner as men and women are subject to prejudicial treatment on the basis of gender alone. Sexism occurs when men and women are framed within two dimensions of social cognition.

Discrimination also plays out with networking and in preferential treatment within the economic market. Men typically occupy positions of power within the job economy. Due to taste or preference for other men because they share similar characteristics, men in these positions of power are more likely to hire or promote other men, thus discriminating against women.\[9\]

### Notes and References:

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