

How gender and or sex beliefs sculpt social life

In this discussion, i will discuss gender and or sex, using the word gender as an umbrella for both terminollogy, as i fail to differeniate between the terminollogy. Cross- culturally these terms are divided into subdivisions of what will be discussed as gender.

American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler discuss gender and sex, disclosing that the intial subject of sex/gender was intended to dispute the 'biology is destiny formulation'. Butler argues that sex is biological and gender is 'culturally constructed' (Butler, J. 1990).

Political and social assumption worldwide, has the reaction of gender roles and gender norms. For instance Euro - American epistemologies of gender and the social assumption thrust on to us from growing children, enforcing gender norms and behavioral patterns, that divide us from male to female (for this example). The little girls, attending ballet classes, dressed in pink and pushing a pram to the paradoxically described young muddy, scraped knee little boys riding his bike and making a den up to the 1990's. Although these stereotypical images are much to be desired in this ever equal world, these images and 'social norms' were enforced onto us, up to very recently you were encouraged to fit within these rigid ideas of gender norms.

Many socieites old and new have a 'dominant gender', where typically a patrical society rules, the men take up leader or elders positions. Socially consturcted and assumed ideas of men being superior to the female gender (or and sex) - shape the gender roles and norms that are adopted. The roles of the genders are divided, for example as written by Colin Turnbull in *The forest children* in the 1960s, he discusses the pygmies of the African Congo and the division of chores and roles that contribute to the survival of the hunter gathering society. Typically the men would hunt and women would forage for food. The women would be in charge of finding materials (i.e. banana leaves) to make huts to live in. Men also playing the molimo (once a traditional wooden flute, now a stolen pipe from the construction site) to imitate the animal totem for different motivational purposes for the tribe, and even ritualistic purposes during ceremonies and the women would pretend to be unaware of the pipe molimo. Every role assumed by gender norms of the forest people, shaping the lives from the first day to the last, forming the power relations discussed by Turnbull in the ethnographic report of the pygmies inhabiting the African Congo.

Judith Okely discusses the traveller gypsy community, a rich culture that the traveller gypsy is proud of. Society a constant pressure on the free community to 'conform' to a settling 'regular' way of life. The travelling gypsies take on much disguises when engaging with non-gypsies (gorgies) in order to protect their lifestyle and pressures to become a gorgie. Even in the 'free' living society, social norms and gender norms prevail. A culture of thick tradition, affording genders with their roles as they are born. Women of the travelling community are in charge of the home keeping and child rearing and occasionally sent into the towns to work. The men afforded a higher status, the dominant gender within the community, assuming the role of a king like status, the men purchase the horses (with whom are exceptionally valued within the travelling gypsy community) the men 'own' and sell the horses, these exclusionary

practices divide the gender with the political/social assumption, causing gender oppression within the community whether the community is aware or not. Interestingly for a free- loving open community, they have adopted old fashioned epistemologies of a woman's anatomy and the monthly cycle. Women having to separate their underwear, especially when 'dirty' from these monthly cycles.

Menstruation, an inevitable cycle - as old as women - is still very much a taboo within societies, as above. Cross-culturally we can find similar examples and domains of exclusion, through ethnography even finding domains of exclusion in Euro - American societies. As a nation, the last century has seen Euro - America people relaxing to the idea of a woman's anatomy, and with the help of media (adverts and publicity) affording women their giving right to be unashamed by this paraphernalia of the female gender, that is not a choice.

Paradoxically The tribe of Zambia, discussing menstruation as pollution, segregating women to huts at the bottom of the camp when menstruating, to control the pollution they believe will contaminate them, and thus try and protect the tribe by this means of gender exclusion.

In 1928 Margaret Mead discusses the coming of age in Samoa, almost a century ago describing menstruation in a contrasting manner to above examples, Margaret writes that the people of Samoa are more comfortable with this taboo subject at this time in the Euro- American societies. Margaret also notes that the adolescents do not experience the mental and social infliction that seems to consume adolescents of the same age in a Euro - American society. The community 'ignoring' children both male and female, until they reach the age of 15 - 16 years old.

In conclusion, considering cross- cultural ideas of sex/gender, one can adopt the belief that gender is socially and culturally sculpted by surrounding beliefs and traditions. From one side of the earth to the other side, ideas of gender norms and gender roles are fluid, if not different. It seems wherever we study, there is a social divide within gender. Each community affording genders a place in society, which for the most part they must succumb to. Some ethnographies more extreme than others, but interestingly it can be said that each community affords gender beliefs, norms and roles that contributes to power relations within the society.

Reference Index

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