

Gender Accounting With Reference to Children and Socializing

Dr. Amita Chawadha

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, JNVU, Jodhpur, India

ABSTRACT: In 2009, the 18-year old South African athlete, Caster Semenya, won the women's 800-meter world championship in Track and Field. Her time of 1:55:45, a surprising improvement from her 2008 time of 2:08:00, caused officials from the International Association of Athletics Foundation (IAAF) to question whether her win was legitimate. If this questioning were based on suspicion of steroid use, the case would be no different from that of Roger Clemens or Mark McGuire, or even Track and Field Olympic gold medal winner Marion Jones. But the questioning and eventual testing were based on allegations that Caster Semenya, no matter what gender identity she possessed, was biologically a male.

You may be thinking that distinguishing biological maleness from biological femaleness is surely a simple matter — just conduct some DNA or hormonal testing, throw in a physical examination, and you'll have the answer. But it is not that simple. Both biologically male and biologically female people produce a certain amount of testosterone, and different laboratories have different testing methods, which makes it difficult to set a specific threshold for the amount of male hormones produced by a female that renders her sex male. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) criteria for determining eligibility for sex-specific events are not intended to determine biological sex. "Instead these regulations are designed to identify circumstances in which a particular athlete will not be eligible (by reason of hormonal characteristics) to participate in the 2012 Olympic Games" in the female category (International Olympic Committee, 2012).

To provide further context, during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, eight female athletes with XY chromosomes underwent testing and were ultimately confirmed as eligible to compete as women [1] To date, no males have undergone this sort of testing. Does this not imply that when women perform better than expected, they are "too masculine," but when men perform well they are simply superior athletes? Can you imagine Usain Bolt, the world's fastest man, being examined by doctors to prove he was biologically male based solely on his appearance and athletic ability? Can you explain how sex, sexuality, and gender are different from each other?

Feminist sociology is particularly attuned to the way that most cultures present a male-dominated view of the world as if it were simply the view of the world. Androcentricism is a perspective in which male concerns, male attitudes, and male practices are presented as "normal" or define what is significant and valued in a culture. Women's experiences, activities, and contributions to society and history are ignored, devalued, or marginalized.

In part this is simply a question of the bias of those who have the power to define cultural values, and in part it is the result of a process in which women have been actively excluded from the culture-creating process. It is still common, for example, to read writing that uses the personal pronoun "he" or the word "man" to represent people in general or humanity. The overall effect is to establish masculine values and imagery as normal. A "policeman" brings to mind a man who is doing a "man's job", when in fact women have been involved in policing for several decades now.[3]

KEYWORDS : masculine, feminine, sex, gender, social, children, humanity

I. INTRODUCTION

When filling out a document such as a job application or school registration form you are often asked to provide your name, address, phone number, birth date, and sex or gender. But have you ever been asked to provide your sex and your gender? As with most people, it may not have occurred to you that sex and gender are not the same. However, sociologists and most other social scientists view sex and gender as conceptually distinct. Sex refers to physical or physiological differences between males and females, including both primary sex characteristics (the

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reproductive system) and secondary characteristics such as height and muscularity. Gender is a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions and roles associated with being male or female. Gender identity is the extent to which one identifies as being either masculine or feminine. As gender is such a primary dimension of identity, socialization, institutional participation, and life chances, sociologists refer to it as a core status.[2]



Figure 1. While the biological differences between males and females are fairly straightforward, the social and cultural aspects of being a man or woman can be complicated.

The distinction between sex and gender is key to being able to examine gender and sexuality as social variables rather than biological variables. Contrary to the common way of thinking about it, gender is not determined by biology in any simple way. For example, the anthropologist Margaret Mead's cross cultural research in New Guinea, in the 1930s, was groundbreaking in its demonstration that cultures differ markedly in the ways that they perceive the gender "temperaments" of men and women; i.e., their masculinity and femininity. Unlike the qualities that defined masculinity and femininity in North America at the time, she saw both genders among the Arapesh as sensitive, gentle, cooperative, and passive, whereas among the Mundugumor both genders were assertive, violent, jealous, and aggressive. Among the Tchambuli, she described male and female temperaments as the opposite of those observed in North America. The women appeared assertive, domineering, emotionally inexpressive, and managerial, while the men appeared emotionally dependent, fragile, and less responsible.[4]

The experience of transgendered people also demonstrates that a person's sex, as determined by his or her biology, does not always correspond with his or her gender. Therefore, the terms sex and gender are not interchangeable. A baby boy who is born with male genitalia will be identified as male. As he grows, however, he may identify with the feminine aspects of his culture. Since the term sex refers to biological or physical distinctions, characteristics of sex will not vary significantly between different human societies. For example, it is physiologically normal for persons of the female sex, regardless of culture, to eventually menstruate and develop breasts that can lactate. The signs and characteristics of gender, on the other hand, may vary greatly between different societies as Margaret Mead's research noted. For example, in American culture, it is considered feminine (or a trait of the female gender) to wear a dress or skirt. However, in many Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures, dresses or skirts (often referred to as sarongs, robes, or gowns) can be considered masculine. The kilt worn by a Scottish male does not make him appear feminine in his culture.[5]

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Figure 2. George Catlin (1796-1872), Dance to the Berdache. Catlin’s sketch depicts a ceremonial dance among the Sac and Fox Indians to celebrate the two-spirit person.

Sexuality refers to a person’s capacity for sexual feelings and their emotional and sexual attraction to a particular sex (male or female). Sexuality or sexual orientation is typically divided into four categories: heterosexuality, the attraction to individuals of the opposite sex; homosexuality, the attraction to individuals of one’s own sex; bisexuality, the attraction to individuals of either sex; and asexuality, no attraction to either sex. Heterosexuals and homosexuals may also be referred to informally as “straight” and “gay,” respectively. According to current scientific understanding, individuals are usually aware of their sexual orientation between middle childhood and early adolescence (American Psychological Association, 2008). They do not have to participate in sexual activity to be aware of these emotional, romantic, and physical attractions; people can be celibate and still recognize their sexual orientation. Homosexual women (also referred to as lesbians), homosexual men (also referred to as gays), and bisexuals of both genders may have very different experiences of discovering and accepting their sexual orientation.[6] At the point of puberty, some may be able to claim their sexual orientations while others may be unready or unwilling to make their homosexuality or bisexuality known since it goes against North American society’s historical norms [5]

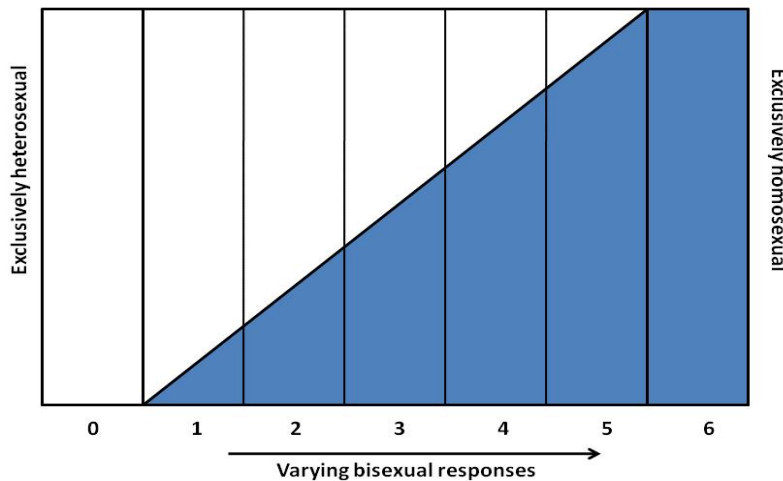


Figure 3. The Kinsey scale indicates that sexuality can be measured by more than just heterosexuality and homosexuality.

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III. OBSERVATIONS

Moral development is an important part of the socialization process. The term refers to the way people learn what society considers to be “good” and “bad,” which is important for a smoothly functioning society. Moral development prevents people from acting on unchecked urges, instead considering what is right for society and good for others. [7] In the pre-conventional stage, young children, who lack a higher level of cognitive ability, experience the world around them only through their senses. It is not until the teen years that the conventional theory develops, when youngsters become increasingly aware of others’ feelings and take those into consideration when determining what’s good and bad. The final stage, called post-conventional, is when people begin to think of morality in abstract terms, such as North Americans believing that everyone has equal rights and freedoms. At this stage, people also recognize that legality and morality do not always match up evenly responsibilities to others and consider people’s reasons behind behaviour that seems morally wrong. They learn to morally view the world in terms of connectedness.[8]

Gender is in this sense an accomplishment rather than an innate trait. It takes place through the child’s developing awareness of self. Whereas in the Freudian model of gender development children become aware of their own genitals and spontaneously generate erotic fantasies and speculations whose resolution lead them to identify with their mother or father, in the sociological model, it is adults’ awareness of a child’s genitals that leads to gender labelling, differential reinforcement and the assumption of gender roles.

The younger children had difficulty classifying the naked photos but could classify the clothed photos. They did not have an understanding of biological sex constancy — i.e. the ability to determine sex based on anatomy regardless of gender signs — but used cultural signs of gender like clothing or hair style to determine gender. Moreover, it was the gender schema and not the recognition of anatomical differences that first determined their choice of gender-typed toys and gender-typed play groups. One way children learn gender roles is through play. Parents typically supply boys with trucks, toy guns, and superhero paraphernalia, which are active toys that promote motor skills, aggression, and solitary play. Girls are often given dolls and dress-up apparel that foster nurturing, social proximity, and role play. Studies have shown that children will most likely choose to play with “gender appropriate” toys (or same-gender toys) even when cross-gender toys are available because parents give children positive feedback (in the form of praise, involvement, and physical closeness) for gender-normative behaviour .[9]

It is known that transgendered and transsexual individuals experience discrimination based on their gender identity. People who identify as transgendered are twice as likely to experience assault or discrimination as non-transgendered individuals; they are also one and a half times more likely to experience intimidation (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2010). Organizations such as the Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health (CPATH), Trans Pulse, and the National Center for Trans Equality work to support and prevent, respond to, and end all types of violence against transgendered, transsexual, and homosexual individuals. These organizations hope that by educating the public about gender identity and empowering transgendered and transsexual individuals, this violence will end.[10]

IV. DISCUSSION

The organization of society is profoundly gendered, meaning that the “natural” distinction between male and female, and the attribution of different qualities to each, underlies institutional structures from the family, to the occupational structure, to the division between public and private, to access to power and beyond. Patriarchy is the set of institutional structures (like property rights, access to positions of power, and relationship to sources of income) which are based on the belief that men and women are dichotomous and unequal categories. How does the “naturalness” of the distinction between male and female get established? How does it serve to organize everyday life?

The phrase “boys will be boys” is often used to justify behaviour such as pushing, shoving, or other forms of aggression from young boys.[11] The phrase implies that such behaviour is unchangeable and something that is part of a boy’s nature. Aggressive behaviour, when it does not inflict significant harm, is often accepted from boys and men

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because it is congruent with the cultural script for masculinity. The “script” written by society is in some ways similar to a script written by a playwright. Just as a playwright expects actors to adhere to a prescribed script, society expects women and men to behave according to the expectations of their respective gender role. Scripts are generally learned through socialization, which teaches people to behave according to social norms.[12]

Children learn at a young age that there are distinct expectations for boys and girls. Cross-cultural studies reveal that children are aware of gender roles by age two or three. At four or five, most children are firmly entrenched in culturally appropriate gender roles (Kane, 1996). Children acquire these roles through socialization, a process in which people learn to behave in a particular way as dictated by societal values, beliefs, and attitudes. For example, society often views riding a motorcycle as a masculine activity and, therefore, considers it to be part of the male gender role. Attitudes such as this are typically based on stereotypes — oversimplified notions about members of a group. Gender stereotyping involves overgeneralizing about the attitudes, traits, or behaviour patterns of women or men. For example, women may be thought of as too timid or weak to ride a motorcycle.[13]



Figure 4. Although our society may have a stereotype that associates motorcycles with men, female bikers demonstrate that a woman’s place extends far beyond the kitchen in modern world.

Gender socialization occurs through four major agents of socialization: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Each agent reinforces gender roles by creating and maintaining normative expectations for gender-specific behaviour. Exposure also occurs through secondary agents such as religion and the workplace. Repeated exposure to these agents over time leads men and women into a false sense that they are acting naturally rather than following a socially constructed role.[14]

Family is the first agent of socialization. There is considerable evidence that parents socialize sons and daughters differently. Generally speaking, girls are given more latitude to step outside of their prescribed gender role. However, differential socialization typically results in greater privileges afforded to boys. For instance, sons are allowed more autonomy and independence at an earlier age than daughters. They may be given fewer restrictions on appropriate clothing, dating habits, or curfew. Sons are also often free from performing domestic duties such as cleaning or cooking, and other household tasks that are considered feminine. Daughters are limited by their expectation to be passive, nurturing, and generally obedient, and to assume many of the domestic responsibilities.[15]

Even when parents set gender equality as a goal, there may be underlying indications of inequality. For example, when dividing up household chores, boys may be asked to take out the garbage or perform other tasks that require strength or toughness, while girls may be asked to fold laundry or perform duties that require neatness and care. It has been found that fathers are firmer in their expectations for gender conformity than are mothers, and their expectations are stronger for sons than they are for daughters . This is true in many types of activities, including preference of toys, play styles,

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discipline, chores, and personal achievements. As a result, boys tend to be particularly attuned to their father's disapproval when engaging in an activity that might be considered feminine, like dancing or singing. The reinforcement of gender roles and stereotypes continues once a child reaches school age. Until very recently, schools were rather explicit in their efforts to stratify boys and girls. The first step toward stratification was segregation. Girls were encouraged to take home economics or humanities courses and boys to take shop, math, and science courses.[16]

V. RESULTS

Women continue to do more of the unpaid labour in the household — meal preparation and cleanup, childcare, elderly care, household management, and shopping — even if they have a job outside the home. In 2010, women spent an average 50 hours a week looking after children compared to 24.4 hours a week for men, 13.8 hours a week doing household work compared to 8.3 hours for men, and, of those caring for elderly family members, 49% of women spent more than 10 hours a week caring for a senior compared to 25% for men . This double duty keeps working women in a subordinate role in the family structure and prevents them from achieving the salaries of men in the paid workforce .[17]

Women's participation in the labour force has been increasing from 42% of women in 1976 to 58% of women in 2009. Women now make up 48% of the total labour force (compared to 37% in 1976). They continue to dominate in “pink collar” occupations and part-time work, which are low paying, low status, often unskilled jobs that offer little possibility for advancement. In 2009, 67% of women still worked in traditionally “feminine” occupations like teaching, nursing, clerical, administrative or sales, and service jobs. 70% of part-time and 60% of minimum wage workers were women .[18]

Despite women making up nearly half (48%) of payroll employment, men vastly outnumber them in authoritative, powerful, and, therefore, high-earning jobs (Statistics Canada, 2011). Women's income for full-year, full-time workers has remained at 72% of the income of men since 1992. This in part reflects the fact that women are more likely than men to work in part time or temporary employment. The comparison of average hourly wage is better: Women earned 83% of men's average hourly wage in 2008, up from 76% in 1988 (Statistics Canada, 2011). However, as one report noted, if the gender gap in wages continues to close at the same glacial rate, women will not earn the same as men until the year 2240 .[19]

The reason for the gender gap in wages is fourfold. Firstly, there is gender discrimination in hiring and salary. Women and men are often not rewarded equally for the same work despite the fact discrimination on the basis of sex is unconstitutional in Canada. Secondly, as we noted above, men and women tend to be concentrated in different types of work which are not equally paid. Often because of choices made in high school and postsecondary education, women are limited to pink collar types of occupation. Thirdly, the unequal distribution of domestic duties, especially child and elder care, women are unable to work the same number of hours as men and experience disruptions in their career path. Fourthly, the work typically done by women is arbitrarily undervalued with respect to the work typically performed by men. It is certainly questionable that early childhood education occupations dominated by women involve less skill, less training, or less significance to society than many trades dominated by men, but there is a clear disparity in wages between these typically gender segregated types of occupation.[21]

Beyond the economic sphere, there has been a long history of power relations based on gender . When looking to the past, it would appear that society has made great strides in terms of abolishing some of the most blatant forms of gender inequality (see timeline below) but the underlying effects of male dominance still permeate many aspects of society. The issue remains especially pertinent with regard to political representation. As elected representatives, the ratio of women to men in federal parliament and provincial legislatures is about 1 in 4, or 25%

- Before 1859 — Married women were not allowed to own or control property
- Before 1909 — Abducting a woman who was not an heiress was not a crime

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- Before 1918 — Women were not permitted to vote (propertied women's right to vote was taken away in New France in 1849)
- Before 1929 — Women were not legally considered "persons"
- Before 1953 — Employers could legally pay a woman less than a man for the same work
- Before 1969 — Women did not have the right to a safe and legal abortion (Nellie McClung Foundation, N.d.)

VI. CONCLUSION

According to critical sociology, society is structured by relations of power and domination among social groups (e.g., women versus men) that determine access to scarce resources. When sociologists examine gender from this perspective, we can view men as the dominant group and women as the subordinate group. According to critical sociology, social problems and contradictions are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups. Consider the women's suffrage movement or the debate over women's "right to choose" their reproductive futures. It is difficult for women to rise above men, as dominant group members create the rules for success and opportunity in society.[22]

Feminist theory is a type of critical sociology that examines inequalities in gender-related issues. It also uses the critical approach to examine the maintenance of gender roles and inequalities. Radical feminism, in particular, considers the role of the family in perpetuating male dominance. In patriarchal societies, men's contributions are seen as more valuable than those of women. Women are essentially the property of men. Through the feminist struggles for women's emancipation in post-feudal modern society, the property relationship has been formally eliminated. Nevertheless, women still tend to be relegated to the private sphere, where domestic roles define their primary status identity. Whereas men's roles and primary status is defined by their activities in the public or occupational sphere.[23]

As a result, women often perceive a disconnect between their personal experiences and the way the world is represented by society as a whole. Patriarchal perspectives and arrangements, widespread and taken for granted, are built into the relations of ruling. As a result, not only do women find it difficult to find their experiences acknowledged in the wider patriarchal culture, their viewpoints also tend to be silenced or marginalized to the point of being discredited or considered invalid[24]

In the area of sexuality, sociologists focus their attention on sexual attitudes and practices, not on physiology or anatomy. As noted above, sexuality is viewed as a person's capacity for sexual feelings and the orientation of those feelings. Studying sexual attitudes and practices is a particularly interesting field of sociology because sexual behaviour is a cultural universal. Throughout time and place, the vast majority of human beings have participated in sexual relationships. Each society, however, interprets sexuality and sexual activity in different ways. Many societies around the world have different attitudes about premarital sex, the age of sexual consent, homosexuality, masturbation, and other sexual behaviours that are not consistent with universally cultural norms. [25]

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