

Gender has multiple meanings. How do you ~~understan~~ deconstruct the word "Gender"?

Ans=

i) Introduction:

For a long time in the history of the world, and even today, gender and sex are often used interchangeable. However, as feminism progressed and the world, in general became more conscious about the gendered division that has existed, scholars began to draw a distinction between sex and gender.

Whereas sex refers to the biological condition of being a male or a female, the term "gender" is an illusory concept, in the development of which, sociological factors have a role to play (as agreed by most scholars). According to the United Nations, "Gender" refer to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They

are context / time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context.

2) Various Meanings of Gender

Many scholars from the feminist theory argue that the roots of the concept of gender are sociological, rather than biological. Judith Butler, the famous feminism activist wrote in her book "Gender Trouble",

"Nobody is born one gender or the other. We act, walk, speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or a woman".

Similarly, Simone De Beauvoir, the popular feminist who penned down the famous book 'The Second Sex', presented the concept of the societal roots of gender in the following words in her aforementioned book,

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described

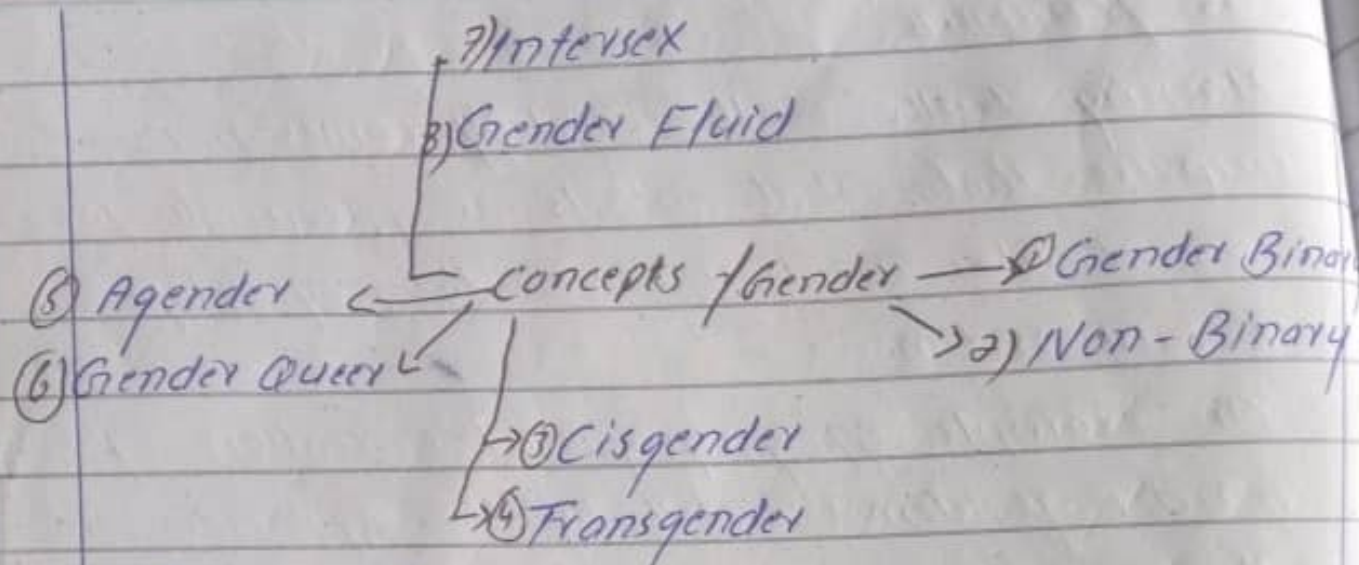
as feminine"

Having links with sociology, comes as no surprise that what entails as appropriate for a particular gender varies with geography as well as time.

An example of geographical variation of gender is demonstrated by the differences in the acceptability of crying men. In western societies, it is now considered acceptable for men to cry whereas in the societies of the sub-continent, crying is considered as "unmanly" and not acceptable for men. An example of evolution of gender with time is found in the focus upon female literacy in Pakistan. In earlier times, underage marriages of women were common, and the only task women were considered to do was managing the household.

This trend has improved significantly, with higher female enrollment rates in schools and prevention of and laws against underage marriages.

As gender is a sociological concept, its scope is not specific and limited. Rather, it has a number of concepts associated with it.



a) Gender Binary:

Gender binary refers to the classification of gender into two categories, i.e. male and female. There is no third category involved. This classification involves placing individuals who identify as queer-gendered to also be placed in one of the two categories.

b) Non-binary:

Non-binary individuals identify neither with the male gender nor with the female gender. Hence, they use the pronouns "they/them" in order to refer to themselves. They also come within the category of gender queer.

c) Cisgender:

Cisgender are the individuals who identify with their ascribed gender. The example is of a baby girl who was ascribed female.

gender at birth and who grows up to identify as a female.

Transgender:

Transgender people are the people who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. An example of this category of people is an individual who was assigned male gender at birth but who grew up to identify as a female, and vice versa. In recent times, the social media was taken over by the news that Farah Hosseini, the child of the famous author Khaled Hosseini, had come out as a transgender. Transgender people adopt the pronouns of the gender that they identify with.

e) Agender:

An Agender person refuses to be categorized into any of the gender categories.

7) Gender Queer:

Gender queer is an interesting, yet holistic term. Queer generally refers to anything that is not considered normal. Hence, gender queer is an all-encompassing term used to describe all but male and female cisgender individuals. This category includes agender people, transgender and intersex people.

g) Intersex:

Unlike transgender people, intersex people are those who are born with both, male as well as female sexual characteristics.

According to medline plus, a medical website "intersex is a group of conditions in which there is a discrepancy between the external genitals and the internal genitals (the testes and ovaries)". In the earlier days, intersex people were known as hermaphrodites.

h) Gender Fluid:

Gender Fluid people change their gender identity with time, and can identify with a binary or a non-binary gender identity at any given time. An example is that of a boy who identifies with his assigned gender till the age of 20. At the age of 20, the cisgender boy decides to identify as a girl, till he reaches the age of 25 and starts to identify as non-binary.

Deconstructing Gender:

Gender is a social phenomenon. The extent of the play of societal factors in its development and furtherance is debated by scholars. The sociological nature of the term

has enabled numerous feminism enthusiasts to dissect into the concept, and find means to deconstruct the concept.

a) Gender as an illusion:

The fact that gender concepts vary with place and time signifies that the concept is fluid: it is socially constructed, and has no solid, rigid meaning. The concept itself is dynamic and evolving, which makes gender equality a possibility.

b) Acknowledging Gender stereotypes:

one cannot take remedial action to rectify an issue until the issue is acknowledged. Hence, to deconstruct gender, it is important to identify stereotypical behaviour.

c) Giving up special virtues:

As a result of gender stereotypes, special virtues are extended to women, for e.g. relaxation in queues, seats being offered to women without respecting the first come, first serve basis. Such special privileges are not appreciated in feminism. Hence, women must give these up if they want the efforts for gender equality to materialize.

d) Restructuring of Labour Force:

As per International Labour office, the Labour force participation rate of women as of 2021 was only 46%, whereas that of men was 75.9%.

The employment must be restructured to inculcate gender equality by robust anti-discrimination and anti-harassment laws at workplaces, facilities for women (for e.g. maternal and paternal leaves, day-cares etc.) and skill development and education for women.

e) GAD Focus:

The strategy of Gender And Development (GAD) focuses upon gender mainstreaming: the concept of analyzing the impact of development strategies upon gender. It is very important to conduct gender mainstreaming to ensure that all genders prosper as a result of policies, and none is undermined.

Conclusion:

Gender is an evolving and dynamic concept. Its components and aspects vary with regards to various factors. In order to deconstruct it. It is important to understand its aspects, embrace them and then work upon reducing the gap between the genders by inclusive policies and strategies.