

Q NO 2 = Gender has multiple meanings. How do you deconstruct the word "GENDER"?

INTRODUCTION:

Gender has been widely misunderstood as a word that could be used in place of sex for centuries.

Due to its multiple and diverse meanings and connotations it stands at crossroads with other disciplines and ideologies.

In order to understand the meaning and nature of the gender we will deconstruct it in different perspectives to get deeper understanding behind its largely gained popularity in the modern world.

ETYMOLOGY AND LINGUISTIC

EVOLUTION OF GENDER

The word "gender" is derived from the French word "genre" which is used to segregate between sexes and nouns in the language. The term 'gender' is borrowed from linguistics to represent masculine and feminine as well as neutral as an umbrella term. In post-structuralism analysis, "men" and "women" are regarded as constructions or representations of performance of rigid repetitive roles.

rather than being real entities. The binary nature of gender has been strictly challenged by many feminists, liberals and scholars of social sciences.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GENDER

Social Sciences, especially Sociology, largely ignored gender prior to 1960s and 1970s. The people it focused on were men and the topics that were significantly impacting men's lives ~~are~~ i.e. paid work and social conduct. Meanwhile women were presented as domestic entities and their role as mothers and wives as indicated by Rosemarie Tong in Feminist Thoughts. The term gender and gender identity gained widespread popularity with the second wave of feminism. Scholars started considering gender as social construction rather than being innate or natural which brought revolution in research in many social sciences including sociology, psychology, Anthropology and philosophy.

"For most of history,
Anonymous was a woman."
- Virginia Woolf

Date _____

SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION: ROLES, EXPECTATIONS, AND STEREOTYPES

"All masculine and feminine traits are socially constructed and stereotyped."
- Alan G. Johnson

Gender is a process by which individuals born into the biological categories of male and female become social categories of men and women through locally-defined traits and attributes of masculine and feminine. Gender is learned by being part of a community which has pre-defined set of attributes reserved to represent masculine and feminine.

The factors that play an important role in teaching gender to a newly born individuals include but are not limited to, family, education, media, language, culture, religion and profession.

The most common roles that are expected from males in a society is to be strong, assertive and emotionally ~~to be~~ unavailable and suppressed. The most common traits expected from females are to act modestly, nurturing and emotionally expressive. (Social Learning Theory).

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION: INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES AND SOCIALIZATION

According to the cognitive development theory of gender, when an individual is launched in a society, he or she absorbs messages like a sponge by observing and using their senses.

"Your mind is constructed by
what you learn from society."
- Sandra Bem

This is well confirmed by Erikson's Psychosocial Theory which states that a number of external factors play an important role in construction of gender such as family, schools, media and literature. Girls idealise their mothers and learn feminine traits meanwhile boys idealise their fathers and learn masculine traits by observing and copying them.

Judith Spector in her publication "Gender Studies- New Directions in Feminist Criticism" states that social and cultural patterns of gender are internalized to an extent that our self-image is partially determined by the fact that we are male or female.

INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER

Gender intersects with other dimensions of one's identity such as race, class, religion, nationality, disability, ethnicity and sexuality which largely impact individual experiences of oppression and inequalities.

Example: A black middle class man has less privileges than a white middle class woman.

It is crucial to understand and take into consideration all those factors while analyzing one's gender identity in order to challenge systemic discrimination.

LEGISLATION AND ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Gender has been used as a discriminatory tool in the distribution of material & power, labour, property, income and education. It is important to highlight inclusivity of all genders on legal and political platforms for equal distribution of both material (food, shelter, work opportunities) and immaterial (freedom, rights, justice) life needs.

The Women's Suffrage Movement is a historical movement that proves how women were not considered to be part of the law and policy-making processes and it was assumed that anything happening outside the domestic sphere does not affect the lives of the women.

It is only after 1960s, that women are now being believed to be vital entities in representative and leadership roles.

CONTEMPORARY DEBATES AND DISCOURSE OF GENDER

Gender is a widely discussed topic of post-modernism with debates including and discussions of cultural and societal shift of attitudes towards gender. These include discussions about gender based violence with activism of local as well as international bodies like #metoo movement.

The contemporary discourse of gender is inclusive of all forms of gender identity. Transgender persons are also being recognized and accepted in all aspects of life. Gender pay gap and economic inequalities, conversations about gender disparities in education including promotion of girls in the fields of STEM are also taking place.

These discussions continue to shape our understanding of gender dynamics and systemic oppression and privileges.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, gender is a term independent of one's biological makeup. It is socially constructed by culture, civilization, constitution, and rituals in a society.

Gender is an acquired status within a society which is affected by factors including but not limited to family, education, cultural practices and literature.

It is important to understand gender in order to eliminate system discrimination and oppression on the basis of race, religion, sexuality and population contributing to a diverse and peaceful society.