

# Principles of Sociology

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# Principles of Sociology

## **7th Session**

### **Gender, Race and Ethnicity:**

**Social discrimination, exclusion and inequalities**

# Gender

## ● Gender and Sex

- The distinction between sex and gender enable us to recognize that many differences between males and females are not biological.
- In sociological discourse, the term '**sex**' refers to the *anatomical and physiological differences* that define male and female bodies.
- The term '**gender**' refers to the *social and cultural differences* between males and females.
- *Gender is related to the socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity.*
- Gender identities and social roles are largely products of cultural definitions about masculinity and femininity.

# **Theoretical approaches to gender**

## ● **Theories of ‘natural difference’: Gender and biology**

- Theories of ‘natural difference’ claim that differences in the behavior of women and men are the result of sex.
- These differences are innate, as they depend on biological elements, such as hormones, chromosomes, brain size, muscles' tissues.
- Their argument is based on the view that these differences can be detected across almost all cultures, as the division of labor seems to be similar in most societies.

- **Critique to theories of ‘natural difference’:**

- Theories of ‘natural difference’ are often grounded in data on animal behavior rather than in anthropological or historical evidence about human behavior, which reveal variation over time and place.
- The fact that some differences appear to many societies does not mean that these differences are biological grounded.
- These theories that argue that human behavior is defined by innate predisposition seem to ignore the crucial role of social interaction in shaping human behavior.

## ● Theories of Gender Socialization

- Gender differences are not biologically determined, but they are culturally produced.
- Theories of gender socialization argue about the distinction between *biological sex* and *social gender*.
- The process of socialization refers to the learning of gender roles, promotion of social norms and expectations.
- The agencies of socialization (*primary*: family, *secondary*: school, peer groups, media) play critical role to making of gender identities.
- Individuals learn to adopt and internalize models of behavior, types of feeling and acting, ideal images about male and female body, as well as gender roles, and so they are engaged in the construction of their gender subjectivity.



- **Functionalist perspective on gender**

- To Functionalists, the process of gender socialization is accomplished by positive and negative sanctions.
- The internalization of social norms and expectations is supported by positive and negative reinforcements.
- Agencies of socialization control the process of gender socialization of new generations, and in this way contribute to the reproduction of the gender and social order.
- **Critique:**
- Socialization theories neglect the ability of individuals to reject or/and modify the social norms and expectations attached to sex roles.

## ● **The social construction of gender and sex**

- *Social constructionist approach* rejects any biological basis for gender differences.
- This approach rejects the distinction between sex (determined biologically) and gender (culturally constructed).
- The human body and biology are not ‘givens’, but are subject to human agency and personal choice within different social contexts.
- Sociologists and theorists of this approach view both *sex and gender as socially constructed products*.
- The human body itself can be altered (symbolically and materially) in various ways, through fashion, exercise, piercing, plastic surgery and sex-change operations.
- Gender identities emerge in relation to perceived sex differences in society and in turn help to shape those differences.

## ● Gender relations

- In Western capitalist societies, gender relations are still defined by patriarchal power.
- From the individual to the institutional level, the dominance of men over women consists of the main pattern of power relation.
- R. Connell argues that gender relations are the product of everyday interactions and practices.
- This gender order implies certain power relations between men and women, which are reproduced through day-to-day social practices and individual behavior.
- Connell supports that there are three main 'fields' in which gender relations are constituted:
  - *a) Labour* refers to the sexual division of labour
  - *b) Power* operates through social relations
  - *c) Cathexis* concerns dynamics within intimate, emotional and personal relationships.

- We have to do with a *gender order/gender regime*, namely with a pattern, a model of gender relations.
- Every social institution (family, school, state e.tc) is characterized by its own gender regime.
- Gender relations are not viewed as fixed, as these patterns of relations between masculinities and femininities are subject to modification and change.
- Gender regime/order is the product of everyday human social action and exchanges.
- From this dynamic perspective, we can recognize the crucial role of human agency, as individuals have the possibility to reject the imposed gender identities, roles and relations.

- **World gender order**

- The gendered division of labour is reproduced in multinational and transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations.
- International media corporations contribute to the dissemination of gender relations through their symbolic (spectacular) products.
- Global markets of commodities and services are also gender structured.

- **Gender crisis**

- In our contemporary social world, there are tendencies that set under pressure the models of gender arrangements/relations.
- Connell refers to three aspects of gender crisis:
  - **a) *crisis of institutionalization***
  - **b) *crisis of sexuality***
  - **c) *crisis of interest formation***

# Theories of gender inequality

- *Gender is a basic dimension of social stratification.*
- Life chances, expectations, social roles, educational and occupational chances, all these are gender defined and structured.
- The main female role model refers to the role of housekeeper and affectionate mother, and tender and caring wife. In almost every culture, women are charged with the duty to ensure the upbringing of children and the fulfillment of domestic work.
- Men are charged with the provision of livelihood. Their social role is placed outside household, in market and public space.
- This division of labour between the sexes has led to men and women assuming unequal positions in terms of power, prestige and wealth.
- Gender differences are the outcome of, and the cause for social inequalities.

- **Functionalist approach**

- From functionalist perspective, gender differences contribute to social stability and integration, and so to the reproduction of social order.
- According to Talcott Parsons, the institution of family requires a concrete division of labour between men and women.
- Women have to perform *expressive roles*, by providing love, care, affection to children, and comfort to their husbands. Men should perform *instrumental roles* - namely, being the breadwinner in the family.
- Functionalists support that the biologically differences between sexes can serve as the basis for the development of a complementary division of labor, that can ensure the strong emotional bonding and solidarity, as well as ‘functionality’ of the family.



- **Critique:**

- 1) Feminists have developed a strong critique against to arguments about a biologically based division of labor. Gender division of labor is a product of individuals socialization into specific, gender-defined, social roles.
- 2) The functionalist idea of 'expressive' female seems to justify the existing division of labor and power relations between men and women in the family relations.

**Feminist theories:**

**Liberal, Socialist, Radical,**

**Black, Postmodern Feminism**

## ● **Liberal feminism**

- Liberal feminism looks for explanations of gender inequalities in social and cultural attitudes.
- Liberal feminists focus on sexist and discriminatory perceptions and behavior in specific social settings, such as family, workplace, media, education.
- They do not view gender inequalities through a general, structural analytical prism.
- Their political plan aims to the protection of women and to the legislative safekeeping of women's rights.
  
- **Critique:**
- The main critique refers to the liberal view's ignorance of structural/systemic inequalities between men and women. The various and interlinked deprivations (sexism, unequal life chances, differential gender access to educational and occupational chances, non-equivalent pay) have their roots to the social system.

## ● **Socialist feminism**

- Socialist feminists strive for the eradication of patriarchy and capitalism.
- According to F. Engels, women's oppression is based on private property, which is mainly concentrated to men's hand. From this aspect, women's subordination is alike to working class oppression.
- Capitalism intensifies patriarchy more than earlier social systems because it creates enormous wealth which confers power on men as wage-earners as well as possessors and inheritors of property.
- The successful capital recycling, namely, the reproduction of capitalist economy requires a heavy demand for commodities. The role of zealous consumers is mainly ascribed to women.
- The reproduction of capitalist relations depends largely on the unpaid domestic work of women.
- Socialist feminists call for the abolishment of 'domestic slavery' and propose collective structures which will undertake the upbringing and household work as a substitution for housewife's duties.
- Social feminists connect the female emancipation with the overturn of capitalism.

## ● **Radical feminism**

- The focus of radical feminism's attention is on the patriarchic domination.
- To radical feminists, family is one of the main site of women's subordination and oppression.
- Some radical feminists view various types of male violence against women, such as domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment, as means of male domination and main traits of patriarchic system of relations.
- Patriarchy is a model of power relations between men and women, that entails the exploitation of women's sexuality.
- The unpaid domestic work of women is the primary source of their exploitation by men.
- Women's confinement into domestic sphere deprive them from access to public space and sources of income, education, power, self-esteem and influence.

- The public images for women (standards of beauty and female sexuality), promoted by mass media and advertisements, define the ‘proper’ type of femininity and ‘objectify’ women’s body for the male (visual, sexual) pleasure.
- Radical feminists argue that *‘the personal is political’*, and in this way they give prominence to various aspects of women’s exploitation and subordination.
- To some radical feminists, women seem to comprise a ‘sex class’ on the basis of their social position.
- Female emancipation cannot be achieved through legislative ameliorations but only through radical overturn and transformation of the existing family relations.
- **Critique:**
- 1) The concept of patriarchy as it has been used by radical feminists seems to be very general, and so is unable to account historically and culturally different types of male domination.
- 2) The factors of race, class and ethnicity differentiate women’s social position and experience, so the uniform view of women is problematic.

## ● **Black feminism**

- Black feminists argue that many feminist theories focus only on white, middle-class women's daily experience in western capitalist societies.
- Women's oppression can take different forms along the lines of class, race and ethnicity. For instance, the oppression of black women may be found in different locations compared with that of white women.
- American black feminists point to the influence of the legacy of slavery, segregation and the civil rights movement on gender inequalities in the black community.
- Black feminists give prominence to the fact that black women confront various and multiple disadvantages and discriminations on the basis of their skin color, their sex and their class position.

## ● **Postmodern feminism**

- Postmodern feminists reject the idea that there is a unitary basis of identity and experience shared by all women.
- To them, patriarchy, race, class, ethnicity consist of general social categories, that are imposed on the plurality of social experience.
- Postmodernism seeks to bring out different standpoints as equally valid.
- Postmodern feminists purport to ‘hear’ the voices of various individuals and groups, all of whom have very different experiences (heterosexuals, lesbians, black women, working-class women, etc.).
- The recognition of ‘otherness’, of difference (of sexuality, age and race) is central to postmodern feminism.
- Postmodern feminists strive for deconstructing male language and a masculine view of the world. They search for different groups’ truths, experience, self-definitions and worldviews.



# Race and Ethnicity

# Race

- **Theories of biologically determined races**
- Scientific theories of race arose in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- The father of modern racism, de Gobineau (1816-82) developed a race typology:
- a) white (*Caucasian*): *white race is characterized by superior qualities, such as high intelligence, morality and will-power*
- b) black (*Negroid*): *black people are characterized by an animal nature, emotional unpredictability, and immorality*
- c) yellow (*Mongoloid*)
- These ideas supported and justified the European imperialism and domination over other populations.
- Scientific racism's ideas were used in shaping German Nazi party's belief system and other racist groups' ideology, such as the Ku-Klux-Klan in U.S.A.

- ***Racialization***

- Racialization is the process of individuals classification on the basis of naturally occurring physical features.
- The categorization of people into race-biological schemes supports the policies and attitudes of discrimination, exploitation and social exclusion.
- The position of individuals in a racial category defines largely their life chances, types and conditions of employment, educational and occupational chances, and their citizenship.

- ***Critique:***

- Race is nothing more than an ideological construct, as the choice of specific physical differences between people as determining for their human behavior is not biological, but political.
- The social significance of some physical differences (like skin color) is culturally and politically defined.

- Race can be understood as a set of social relationships, which allow individuals and groups to be located, and various attributes or competencies assigned, on the basis of biologically grounded features.
- Racial distinctions are ways of describing physical differences in terms of superiority and inferiority of human beings.
- Racial differences serve as the basis on which power relations and patterns of social discrimination and exclusion are enacted.

- **Institutional racism**

- The term institutional racism means that racism pervades all of society's structures in systematic manner.
- Central social institutions, such as the police, the health service, the state, the education system, public services all promote policies that favor certain groups, while discriminating against others.
- In culture and spectacle industry, institutional racism has also been revealed, as negative stereotypes of ethnic and social groups are promoted.

- **Cultural racism**

- Biological racism has been displaced by a more sophisticated new racism, *cultural racism*, which uses the idea of cultural differences to exclude certain groups.
- Hierarchies of superiority and inferiority are constructed according to the values of the majority culture.
- Those groups or individuals who don't assimilate, or reject, dominant cultural group's systems of value, they are marginalized and excluded.

## ● Ethnicity

- Ethnicity refers to this distinct set of cultural qualities, such as cultural practices, language, religion, history, lifestyle, ancestry, system of beliefs, that define an ethnic group.
- Members of ethnic groups see themselves as culturally distinct from other groups and are seen by them, in return, as different.
- The ethnic identities and lifestyles are reproduced and transferred over generations through the process of socialization. People adopt and internalize specific norms, values, worldviews, learn their language, and unfold certain cultural practices.
- The successful socialization of individuals into ethnic community provides and enforces the sense of belonging to this ethnic group, the sense of being part of this.
- Beyond socialization and ordinary cultural practices, the borders between different ethnic groups are protected by the use 'exclusionary devices' (i.e: prohibiting of intermarriage and, some times, daily interaction between people from different ethnic group).

## ● **Minority groups**

- Sociologically, a minority group refer to the members of a group who have:
- **a)** less access to sources of power, wealth and prestige than members of the dominant group do
- **b)** developed an intense sense of solidarity
- **c)** the feeling of belonging together.
- The term minority does not have quantitative reference, as it does not refer to the number of group members but to their disadvantaged social position.
- Members of a minority group are usually subject of discrimination, exclusion and prejudice.

- **‘Closure’** refers to the process whereby groups maintain boundaries, separating themselves from others.
- These boundaries are formed by means of exclusion devices, which sharpen the divisions between one ethnic group and another.
- Minority’s exclusion is expressed socially (social relations, daily interactions, patterns of marriage and sexual relationships) and spatially (concentration in specific, many times, remote, urban areas- ethnic ghettos).
- Group closure coincides with resource allocation, instituting inequalities in the distribution of wealth and material goods.
- People within the minority sometimes actively promote endogamy (marriage within the group) in order to keep alive their cultural distinctiveness.



- **Prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination**

- *Prejudice* refers to opinions or attitudes held by members of one group towards another.
- These opinions are largely based on rumors, second-hand information than on personal experience.
- Prejudice are schemes of perception based on negative evaluation of other, different, social groups.
- These scheme of perception and evaluation are rigid and fix, as they are grounded in stereotypes.
- *Stereotypes* are stable, inflexible, unchangeable representations about the qualities of a group of people.
- Stereotypes are often applied to ethnic minority groups.
- Most stereotypes consist of a devise of displacement of feelings of rage, frustration and hostility. Stereotypes target other than real sources of those feelings.

- ***Scapegoating*** is common when two deprived ethnic groups come into competition with one another for economic rewards.
- People who direct racial attacks against ethnic minorities, for example, are often in an economic position similar to theirs.
- Scapegoating is normally directed against groups that are distinctive and relatively powerless, because they make an easy target.
- ***Discrimination*** refers to the activities that prevent certain social groups from life opportunities.

# ● Bibliography

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