

**Social divisions are
socially constructed**



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Sociologists argue that gender is the social meaning given to their sex category. Furthermore, that we (human beings) have created a gender social division through our Historical, Cultural and Social Practices. This means that the way we have lived in society has structured and created what it is like to be male or female/Masculine or feminine. This poses a challenge to the Biological Assumption that our sex (i. e. our chromosomes and genes) determines whether we are male or female and also determines what it is like to be masculine or feminine.

The debate above will be the subject matter of this essay. Closely looking at how our historical, cultural and social practices have created gender and more importantly created gender inequalities in regards to health, wealth, occupations. Also generally looking at unequal social perceptions of how men are perceived to be stronger (physically and emotionally) and how men are perceived to be better at certain things e. g. football, driving. In contrast looking at how it is incorrect to presume that a male's Biological Characteristics make him better at certain things mentioned above or how a woman's Biological characteristics make her weaker than a man.

The theory of biological essentialism (Marsh et al 2009) argues, as mentioned above, that our gender is determined by our sex, i. e. our chromosomes and genes which also determines what it is like to be a male or a female. This theory has been the subject of many sociologic studies because " sex differences have often been proposed as explanations for the differences in social roles performed by women and men. Essentialist, or biological, arguments attribute the different social roles performed by woman and men to underlying biological structures." (Marsh et al 2009:

219). The above is suggesting that men and woman take on different roles in household, workplace etc because they are biologically different (Marsh et al 2009). The theory above has been used to suggest that men are more hostile and competitive which is what makes them better at being the breadwinners of the family(Marsh et al 2009), whereas woman have a more caring nature which makes them better for the nurturing roles in the family. (Marsh et al 2009). However, as the biology of a man and woman has always been the same since their existence this does not offer an explanation on why men and women's roles have changed over time and it does not explain why men and women roles are different in different cultures. Therefore although it is acceptable to say that biology may play a small part in explaining the role differences between the different sex groups the best explanation for these differences must be that they are socially constructed through history, culture and social practices.

In contrast the theory of Social Constructionism suggests that our gender is the social meaning given to our sex which shows what it is like to be male or female and also creates implications of being male or female. This theory suggests that from a young age we are taught by those around us what actions are appropriate for your gender. This is called " Gender Socialization" (Marsh et al 2009: 222). Furthermore it has been said that " The girl learns to hamper her movements. She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires are too dangerous for her...Studies have found that young children of both sexes categorically assert that girls are more likely to get hurt than boys" (Young 2010: 208).

The above suggests that gender is something that is bred into us from a young age so we never have a chance to challenge what is meant by gender. It also creates a weak perception of the female. This brings me to discuss one of the biggest social constructions today, the idea that women are weak and the idea that they need a man to lift heavy things (Young 2010). It is suggested that the reason females come across as weaker is because they are taught to be feminine from a young age which also means that they have to seem timid (Young 2010). A current example of this would be if we see a woman on a building site doing manual labour our socially constructed minds would automatically not regard her as feminine. Young's argument also suggests that women are not as good at sport as men because "women often approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty and hesitancy. Typically we lack an entire trust in our bodies to carry us to our aims." (Young 2010: 207). The only plausible reason for this is that there is a socially constructed idea that our bodies are not as strong as men's.

This social construction has caused many inequalities to exist between men and women. However, inequalities now have changed from historical inequalities that used to exist. This is because as times have gone on attitudes have changed to what is acceptable for men and women to do. For example, historically men were the bread winners of the family who went to work, whereas the woman's job was to stay at home cook, clean and look after the children. This is not so much the case now with the majority of women going out to work. However, attitudes have not totally changed because even though many women go out to work, there are not many men who stay at home to look after the children, this is seen by society as a

challenge to a man's masculinity with many derogatory terms (for example 'sweetie wife') being used to describe a house husband. Here an inequality exists because of historical practices, the inequality being that society thinks that it is acceptable for a woman to stay at home and not work whereas a man doing the very same thing would be frowned upon. However as one inequality has arisen another has disappeared, for example people no longer think that it is unacceptable for a woman to be in the work place which was the case many years ago. The above provides evidence of historical gender inequalities being socially constructed, this is obvious because the change of attitude and practices over the years has allowed for a change in roles undertaken by the male and the female.

The Social Construction of Gender has created many