

# Essentialism: gender role

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Essentialism refers to the belief that people or culture have and underlying and unchanging state. The concept of essentialism in gender states that there are innate differences between a man and a woman and an unchanged idea of what it means to be a man or a woman. Thus men and women are subject to gender role that is their define occupation, behaviour and role in the society. Non essentialism is that difference in men and women behaviour and role is culturally and socially constructed.

The article “ Scrap that single woman stereotype” (Ellie Mae O’Hagan 2012), illustrate the essentialist view of women role. That is women have limited option about their path. In the article the author illustrate that to be seen as a successful woman, women should subscribe to the gender role laid down by the society. They are less considered if they are not married even if they have achieved an independent economic status. In China, they are considered as “ societal lepers”, outsiders of the society. Society do not accept woman to be totally independent financially and emotionally toward men.

It is illustrated by the case of that woman who had to fly away from China as it was not accepted that at over 27 years old she was not married. The social system follows the essentialist theory and it rewards women for performing their gender role correctly and punishes them if they choose not to follow conventional gender role. Gender essentialism has been used to advocate and explain the conventional and natural role of women. Buss and Schmitt (1993) stated that women are generally more interested in long term relationship than men.

That is women have more tendency to seek for marriage than men. The reason given by Buss and Schmitt for women to want a “ long term mate” is to provide them with resources like money or food. It is an essentialist view of woman not able to provide themselves with money and food. However, increasingly women are independent and challenging the conventional idea that men who are breadwinner. That suggests that the roles played by the two genders are constructed by society and can be changed. Another aspect of essentialism is that roles are mapped out by nature.

The role of woman is natural and exists outside of cultural and social conditioning, thus by nature women need to carrying, emotional or dependant. Women not responding to that view would be always questioned and depreciated by others. The author of the article suggests that women who are single are due to a “ flaw” opposed to “ life natural turbulence”. So by nature women cannot stay single and it is a fault if they stayed unmarried. Those are generalised statement which are asserted and taken for natural and universal.

By consequence, as suggested by Marcia (1966), people think that gender roles reflect natural tendencies and do not consider themselves outside these roles. It influences their decision, occupation and behaviour. The author herself justifies her singlehood and her view of single woman was influenced by the essentialist view of single women, that they are unhappy and do not have a fulfilling life. Essentialist norms about natural traits of a woman, states that women would achieve happiness and satisfaction if they accept the traditional role in relationship.

Thus it maintains gender inequity and patriarchy as a universal system. It manifests in terms of stereotypical assumption about role of women in relation to man. There are assumptions about what women are and what women should be. Even if a woman rejects the stereotypes, she is judge by others with references to stereotypes (Steele 1997). The singlehood is considered to be the woman fault and be blame for it. Singlehood in essentialism is considered also as consequence of women bad decisions, behaviour according to normal gender role and a assume decision of women.

The feminist essentialism as stated by Irigaray, argues that women condition and role has been defined by a patriarchal society. According to feminist women are forced by men to play certain roles defined by feminine traits like passive, submissive, emotional or caring. Women are expected to be wife, mother and cannot transgress those expectations. Feminist have adopted non-essentialism to challenge society. Non- essentialism argues that culture shapes roles for men and women and that it is transmitted by culture through generation.

So societies have pre-existing norms and expectations. According to non-essentialism men and women are socially and culturally grown up to adopt gender specific behaviours. Society maintains and reinforces stereotypes. The articles illustrate also that women do live a fulfilling life whether or not married. Even if researches shows that single woman achieved more in life than single man, society and people still view them as unhappy and faulty. Women like interviewed in the articles are frustrated due to these stereotypes.

Society searches reason for their singlehood. Single women are considered whether workaholic or careerist. Essentialism associated these characteristic to men but no to women. Essentialism maintains gender stereotyping and inequities. Women are expected using the nature reason to behave in a certain way. Even if women now work and are independent they still are expected to fulfil their role of wife and mother. Non-essentialism illustrate that gender determined role is not natural but socially constructed.

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