

# Sex gender and feminism sociology essay



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The purpose of this essay is to identify the formation of gender roles from childhood and how these roles or expectations determine life chances in society. Firstly, the definition of gender through socialization will be looked at from Feminist and Functionalist perspectives followed by studies into the nature of gender, i. e. parental expectations, exploitation of females through children's books and the media etc. A conclusion will then be made based on the research looked at.

### Introduction

The word Gender is not commonly confused with sex which is incorrect. It was first differentiated by Dr. Robert Stoller (an American Psychoanalyst) in the year 1968. According to Stoller, sex is a biological composition that differentiates between men and women, i. e. Genitalia (internal and external). He further pointed out that feminine or masculine qualities are defined by the gender and that the gender and sex are not dependent upon each other.

According to the dictionary, the word feminism is the conviction in economic, political and social equality among both sexes. People perceive feminism in many different ways as people have different experiences in their lives and hence every one takes it in a different way. Therefore, there is no one best way to define feminism. One very vital aspect of feminism is that greatly affects our society including culture and religion.

Gender refers to the factors like psychology, physiology, anatomy, society, and culture of a person. These are the factors one thinks about while describing any other person as masculine or feminine. Gender and sex are

not only the aspect by which people see us, but it is also the way we understand ourselves.

### Gender, Sex and Feminism

According to the feminist belief, women are being exploited by the sources like books, media, and the society by means of children's toys. Feminists are of the view that the society aims to put conditions on children from their birth about their anticipated roles in society. These conditions are generally related to masculine dominance and feminine subordination. The feminist perspective of gender and sex is sub-divided into Radical Feminism and Marxist Feminism

Radical feminists take the argument of masculine dominance and feminine subordination further by labeling the society as patriarchal or that the world is dominated and ruled by men. Radical feminists believe that women have always been under 'the thumb' of men and if men feel threatened, they may resort to violence in order to maintain and exert their power.

This form of feminism and also a few other perspectives believe that patriarchy is the reason for war, conflict, and damaging the environment. Feminists believe that patriarchy is taught and learned in every generation, "the terms valued, control, privilege, domination, power, ideology and culture, all terms that are familiar in sociology.... If this is such a regular feature of society, patriarchy becomes a structure which exists and is created and re-created with each generation. It is learned by males and females through socialization and culture — boys and men learn to be dominant and girls and women to be subordinate (and accept this legitimate form of domination). It <https://assignbuster.com/sex-gender-and-feminism-sociology-essay/>

is continued in the everyday forms of male-female interaction in society, and also perpetuated in the institutions and structures of patriarchy.”

Some radical feminists, female supremacist would argue that society would be better off if a ‘matriarchy’ system was enforced.

In the statement, ‘pink is for girls and blue is for boys’, radical feminists would strongly argue that through parental expectations, toys, books, television etc, begins the exploitation of women. For instance, girls are given dolls to play with, kitchens, prams, tea sets etc, feminists would claim that this conditions girls into their expected roles, i. e. playing the housewife and caring for children. On the other hand, boys are given footballs, computer games, cars, trucks etc, and are encouraged to ‘dummy fight’ mainly by their fathers. This, as feminists would argue, is encouraging boys to be masculine, strong, and aggressive. Radical feminist, Kate Millet (197) pointed out many areas in society where men have been able to exploit women. She began by arguing that male strength is no longer a reason for male dominance because as technology evolves, most modern work doesn’t require strength. Also, she emphasized the importance of women socializing their sons in an attempt to fight against male dominance. Education and religion are also areas in which women are exploited, Millet argued. She pointed out that education enforces inequality in men and women. Religion emphasizes the role of masculinity through the stature of God.

Radical feminist take on the view of women being victims of male dominance and some critics would argue that this is heavily exaggerating both female and male roles in society.

Marxist feminists are slightly different in their view of exploitation. They agree that men play a large part in exercising power over women; however capitalism is the main source. They would argue that although the socialization of children into their gender roles does benefit men, it benefits the capitalists more. By encouraging young girls to play with dolls, cook and clean etc, is endorsing women's role of becoming a housewife and childcarer which allows the men to go out and work, therefore keeping capitalism in force. Feminist, Ann Oakley (1974) stated that all paid work is simply an extension of the work women do at home: childcare, cleaning and caring.

Like radical feminism, Marxist feminist do agree on the need of revolutionary change, however instead of it being a matriarchal system, as proposed by the radical feminists, Marxist feminists state that a communist society should be established.

The functionalism view of gender is very different to that of feminism. Functionalists believe that socialization is one of the key factors in maintaining social harmony or in other words functionalism focuses on society as a whole and how parts of society contribute positively to the whole to make the society run smoothly without conflict. The family is a key instrument in the process of socialization for children and a reinforcement of traditional or functional gender roles.

In recent years, feminists have argued that through the media, television, advertisements / commercials etc, young children are becoming more conscious of their physical appearance, ' advertising also negatively portrays minority women and exploits a child-like image of innocence to define

women's roles.... grown women of all colors (races) are demoted to infant status. A late '90s trend turned women into little-girl sex objects-not that the depiction of women as sex objects is anything, but their depiction as innocent, yet sexy, children is. In advertising, and to some extent general society, innocence is equated with sexy. Hence, an abundance of barely pubescent models parades across billboards and magazine spreads'.

From a feminist viewpoint, this not only accentuates women subordination, but it also degrades women and children.

A feminist would argue that the media and television etc, has a negative impact on the socialization process of children due to male domination but the above extract would show that it is not only male dominated roles in children's book and the media that is the problem, but women demoralizing themselves to please men.

## Conclusion

To conclude on the matter on how gender differences determine life chances in society, it has been made apparent that the exploitation of women begins at birth through parental expectation, i. e. enforcing the rules and norm of society through socialization on how girls and boys should act. Most parents don't want a child that is ' different' therefore, if a baby boy is born, they bestow the rules of masculinity and likewise for a girl.

Studies have shown that society is evolving with regard to the suppression of women; however there are still masses of evidence to show that it still goes on.

There is so much emphasis on equality in today's society through schools, the government etc, therefore young girls do have slightly better life chances than they did 50 years ago but unfortunately not as much as boys.

The essay length is 1200 word maximum; this is approximately 5 pages, reference pages are in addition to this length.

The essay must be a sociologically and/or anthropologically based critical analysis of a topic incorporating a discussion of sex, gender and feminism (this could take the form of feminist theory or works on the topic written from a feminist perspective).

Given the short length of the essay this will be a brief exploratory work, however it must use the structure of a formal essay

Introduction

thesis statement,

body

conclusion

It should also be written using formal language and APA style citation of all sources used. Any course material may be used as references; in addition a minimum of four academic articles and/or books must also be used in the essay.