



Sociology of Gender and Sexuality

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ABSTRACT

Have you ever been questioned about your gender and sex? You may not be aware that sex and gender are not synonymous. Social scientists generally do not consider sex and gender to be conceptually equivalent. There are physical and physiological variations between men and women that are known as sex, including the reproductive system as well as secondary traits like height and muscle mass. Being a man or a woman has social and cultural implications, which is why the term “gender” is used.

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INTRODUCTION

As determined by a person's biology, his or her sex doesn't necessarily match their gender. Therefore, sex and gender are distinct words. Any boy born with male genitalia will be referred to as a “boy” by the medical community. Though he may develop to connect with the feminine features of his culture as he matures, it's possible. There isn't a lot of variation in the features of gender between human civilizations because the term “sex” relates to biological or physical differences. All female sex will ultimately menstruate and produce breasts capable of lactation, regardless of culture. Gender fluidity is prevalent in many civilizations. The term “berdache” was used by certain anthropologists to describe persons who lived and dressed as the other gender on a temporary or permanent basis. Some Aboriginal groups have been found to engage in this custom [1]. In Samoan society, a “third gender” is accepted. One way to characterise people who are both biologically male and gender fluid is to call them “fa'afafine,” which means “the way of the lady.” One of the most significant elements in the Samoan culture is the Fa'afine. Because fa'afafines have a wide range of sexual interests, they may be mistaken for homosexuals by people from other cultures[2].

Sexual Orientation

Heterosexuals are drawn to persons of the opposite sex; homosexuals are drawn to members of their own sex; and bisexuals are drawn to people of both sexes. Asexuals, on the other hand, aren't attracted to anyone in particular. Informally, “straight” and “gay” can be used to describe *heterosexuals* and *homosexuals*. As far as sexual orientation is concerned, North America is a hetero normative culture. Remember, it is common to question a homosexual, “When did you discover you were gay?” While gay and lesbian people are routinely asked, “When was the first time you realised you were gay?”[3].

Adults are generally aware of their sexual orientation between the ages of 12 and 14 according to current scientific understanding (American Psychological Association 2008). Finding and embracing one's sexual orientation may be a highly personal process for everyone, but it can be especially difficult for women, men, and bisexuals of both sexes. Some teenagers may be able to come out as gay or bisexual by the time they reach adolescence, while others may be reluctant to do so since it goes against the grain of traditional values in North American culture.

Kinsey's theories were expanded upon by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's research. Non-sexual same-sex relationships are referred to as “homosocial” in place of the term “homosexual” by her. Men in North American society, says Sedgwick, are divided along this continuum, while women have more flexibility in moving between the two ends. Women in Canada can express their homosocial feelings through physical intimacy, such as embracing and holding hands (nonsexual admiration for persons of the same sex). As a result of heteronormative expectations, Canadian men tend to avoid using these terms. In contrast to women, males are subject to substantial social sanctions if they deviate from the heterosocial-homosocial norm because of the prevalence of homophobia in our society [4].

Gender Roles

People around us teach us how to act as we mature. As part of early socialisation, youngsters learn about gender roles and the expectations that go along with them. Gender roles relate to the socially designated roles that men and

women are supposed to play. These responsibilities are defined by society's established norms or standards. It is common in Canadian society to associate male roles with violence and domination whereas feminine roles are typically viewed as passive and caring. The process of establishing social roles begins as soon as a child is introduced to others. To this day, our culture is fast to dress male and female children according to their gender, even while they are still in the womb, with blue for boys and pink for girls.

Play is a great method for children to learn about gender roles. Dolls and other playthings that promote caring, social proximity, and role-playing are frequently presented to young girls. This is because parents reward their children's gender-normative behaviour by praising them, involving them in activities, and keeping them physiologically close. Male and female behaviour in these occupations is indicative of Canadian culture, which may be traced back to our ancestors. Fulfilment of societal norms but not personal choice might be shown by adhering to them [5].

Gender Identity

When it comes to gender roles, Canadian culture allows for a certain amount of ambiguity. When a person decides to act in a way that is incompatible with their biological sex, they are said to be transgendered. The feminine features of society have such an emotional and psychological impact on transgendered men that they begin to see themselves as female in their gender identity. Transgendered women have a close connection to masculinity. Counting the number of transgender people in the population is a challenge. Neither the number of lesbians, gay men, or bisexuals nor the number of transgender persons has been established by Statistics Canada [6].

A transsexual is a transgendered person who takes medical procedures including surgery and hormone therapy in order to better match his or her gender identification. Transsexuals who are male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM) are also known. Many transgender people don't want to change their appearance, so they keep their original features but show themselves to others as someone of the opposite sex. Typically, this is done by adopting the opposing gender's attire, hairstyle, mannerisms, or other feature. Cross-dressing or wearing clothing traditionally associated with the other sex is not necessarily an indicator of transgenderedness in persons. Transgenderism is not always an act of rebellion against one's biological gender as a form of self-expression, entertainment, or fashion.

Exactly why a person becomes transgender is a mystery. There is a wide range of transgender manifestations and experiences, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly where they originated. Some explanations point to heredity or levels of prenatal hormones as biological variables, while others point to experiences in infancy and adulthood as social and cultural ones.

Gender and Socialization

There is a strong impression that this type of behaviour is innate in boys and cannot be changed. For the most part, boys and men are expected to engage in aggressive behaviour as part of their masculinity, even if the repercussions aren't severe. It is possible to compare the "script" created by society to that of a playwright's. Society expects women and men to act in certain ways based on the roles they play, much like a writer expects their players to follow the script. Through a process called as socialisation, people are taught how to conduct themselves in accordance with the accepted social standards.

Socialization

Boys and girls are taught at an early age that they are expected to meet different standards. The age at which children become aware of gender roles varies from culture to culture. At the age of four or five, most children have firmly established gender roles that are consistent with their society [7]. Stereotypes, or simplistic conceptions about a group's members, are often the basis for negative attitudes like this. Overgeneralizing about women's or men's attitudes, characteristics, or actions is an example of gender stereotyping. Women, for example, may be considered weak or hesitant when it comes to operating a motorbike.

Sexism is based on gender stereotypes. Sexist views are those that place greater importance on one sex than another. Sexism's intensity varies from person to person. Discrimination against women persists despite the fact that it is against the law in Canada. Both micro and macro levels of discrimination based on sex are present. A major area of study for sociologists is institutional prejudice, which refers to bias that is part of the social fabric [8].

Families, schools, peer groups, and the media all play key roles in gender socialisation. Normative expectations for gender-specific behaviour are established and maintained by each actor. Religion and the workplace are examples of secondary agents that contribute to exposure. Repetition of these agents causes men and women to think they are acting in accordance with a socially constructed role rather than their natural instincts.

Socialization begins in the family. Numerous studies have shown that parents socialise their children differently depending on whether they are boys or girls. “As a result of their gender-based brainwashing, boys, on the other hand, tend to benefit more. Sons, for example, are allowed more freedom and independence than their moms at an earlier age. They might have less restrictions on what they can wear, how they can meet, and even when they can return home. Sons are frequently exempt from home chores like as cleaning and cooking, which are traditionally seen as the domain of women. Daughters are constrained by the assumption that they will be submissive, caring, and generally obedient, as well as taking up many of the family's income tasks.

There may be signs of discrimination even if parents are aiming for gender equality. Some home chores require more power and toughness than neatness and care, such as taking out the garbage, thus guys may be assigned those responsibilities while girls may be assigned those tasks. As a result, studies show that dads have higher standards for gender conformity than mothers do, with fathers having higher expectations for boys than for daughters [9]. When it comes to activities like toys, play styles and discipline, duties, and personal accomplishments there is a lot of overlap. Gender norms and prejudices continue to be reinforced after a kid enters the educational system. Many schools were clear in their efforts to separate males and girls until quite recently. To begin stratification, segregation had to take place. Home economics and humanities classes were encouraged for girls and math and science classes were emphasised for guys.

There is some evidence that gender socialisation is still taking place in today's schools, perhaps in more indirect ways [10]. Teacher actions that repeat gender-differentiated behaviours may not even be recognised by the teachers themselves.

Female students are taught from an early age that they are not as bright or important as boys. Compared to their female counterparts, male students received greater praise from professors in a survey of how teachers saw them. As a result, female students were more frequently stopped, while male students were given more time to elaborate on their views [11]. Also, boys are more likely to be allowed to disobey rules or engage in mild deviation, whereas females are required to adhere to norms and maintain an obedient stance [12]. Girls and boys are placed in competing roles in schools, reinforcing gender norms and the “battle of the sexes.”

The first step in building a distinct sense of one's own identity is mimicking the actions of others [13]. Children, like adults, become active actors in promoting and enforcing conventional gender standards. Negative consequences, such as ridicule or exclusion from their classmates, may result when youngsters fail to adapt to gender roles. They may be fairly severe, even if many of these punishments are informal. The term “tomboy” may be used by male and female peers to refer to a girl who chooses to study karate instead of dancing instruction [12]. For boys, gender nonconformity is a source of intense scorn [14; 9].

Another important factor in gender socialisation is the role of the media. Women are frequently reduced to supporting roles, such as spouses or mothers, on screen and in television. For the most part, female stars are either pure and saint-like figures, or wicked and hypersexual ones [15]. Children's movies are no exception to this trend of racial inequity [16].

Advertising and other kinds of media, such as television ads, also perpetuate inequality and gender-based prejudices. Ads for items geared towards to the home, kitchen, or raising children virtually exclusively feature women [17]. A commercial for a dishwasher or laundry detergent may be the last time you saw a male actor in the role of the lead character. When it comes to positions of leadership, intellect or a well-balanced mentality, women tend to be underrepresented. Particularly in music videos, dehumanising representations of women are of special concern.

An important social structure, stratification, is one where certain people have access to essential but highly valuable social resources that others do not. The stratification of Canadian society along gender lines is pervasive (as well as stratification of race, income, occupation, and the like). In the financial sector, gender inequality is most pronounced. When it comes to leadership positions, influence, and pay, men still outnumber women by a wide margin (48 percent) [6]. Since 1992, women's full-year, full-time wages have been 72 percent of men's full-year, full-time wages. The hourly rate of pay is higher on average: For the first time since 1988, women earned more than 80 percent of the average hourly salary for males [6]. However, according to one study, women won't be paid the same as men until 2240 if the income gap between the sexes continues to decrease at its current glacial rate [18]. In addition, the bulk of unpaid work at home is done by women who work in the paid workforce.

It is usual in North America for gender stratification to be based on the division of labour. In his book *Outline of World Cultures* (1954), George Murdock asserts that all civilizations divide work into male and female roles. Cultural universal refers to a trend that can be observed across all cultures. While the practise of dividing up work based on

gender is widespread, no one can concur on the specifics. Men and women over the world are not given the same duty. However, it's worth noting how highly the gender of the assigned to each work is regarded. According to Murdock's research on the global distribution of labour in 324 countries, positions assigned to males were almost universally accorded higher social status [19]. In spite of how comparable the jobs were, men's work was still regarded as more important.

In Canada, gender segregation has existed for a long time. The most obvious manifestations of gender inequality have been eliminated, yet the underlying consequences of male supremacy remain to pervade many facets of society when looking back into the past.

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender

The study of social phenomena is guided by sociological ideas, which give a framework for analysing and understanding the findings of research. When it comes to falling behind in math and science, middle-school females are more likely than males to do so. In order to understand why women are underrepresented in politics, researchers may look into the treatment of female Parliamentarians by their male colleagues when they attend meetings.

Society's mores and values determine what is considered “normal” in sexual behaviour. Societies that place a high value on monogamy are more likely to look upon extramarital sex. Individuals are influenced by their families, schools, friends, media, and religion when it comes to their sexual preferences. Sexual behaviour has always been influenced by religion, but in recent years, peers and the media have become two of the most powerful influences, particularly among North American youth[20]. Sexual attitudes in Canada and throughout the world should be explored in depth.

Sexuality around the World

Sweden is widely regarded as one of the most liberal countries in the developed world when it comes to attitudes on sex, particularly sexual behaviours and sexual openness. It is mandatory for all students in Swedish schools to get sex education beginning at age six, and there are few restrictions on the media's use of sexual imagery. Sweden has been able to sidestep some of the most serious social issues linked with sex because of its liberal stance on the subject. For example, teen pregnancies and STI rates are among the lowest in the world [21]. In this respect, Sweden appears to be a role model for other countries. However, applying Swedish sexuality principles and legislation in countries with a more conservative political climate would very certainly encounter criticism.

Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Sexuality

Sexuality is studied by sociologists from all three major theoretical orientations today. Social hierarchies and relations of power are still heavily influenced by the way sexuality is conceived in society, and this has a huge impact on perceptions, relationships, health and consequences.

Structural Functionalism

Functionalists believe that a healthy sexual life is essential for a happy marriage and a stable family. Structuralism advocates for social systems that promote and protect families because they believe that the family is society's most essential component.

The family, according to functionalists like Talcott Parsons et al. [22], plays a significant role in regulating sexual behaviour. Traditionally, social standards surrounding family life have promoted and discouraged sexual behaviour both within and outside the family unit (marriage) (premarital and extramarital sex). Promoting sexual activity throughout marriage, according to functionalists, improves marital relationships while also ensuring that children are born into a solid, legally recognised union. This set-up guarantees that the youngsters receive the best possible socialisation and that their fundamental needs are met.

Critical Sociology

As with sexuality in general, it is a place where power imbalances are evident and where dominating groups actively work to promote their worldview and financial interests. In 1841, Canada made it a crime to be homosexual in the country. Sodomy was outlawed at the time of Confederation in 1867, and “acts of extreme indecency” between males were made criminal in Canada in 1890. It wasn't until 1953 that “gross indecency” between women was outlawed in the US. As a result, hundreds of gays lost their government positions or were kicked out of the military during the 1950s and 1960s. Hundreds of thousands of people were kept under constant watch [23]. Laws prohibiting gay conduct were not relaxed until 1969, when the Criminal Code was revised. In 1967, Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau exclaimed, “Take this stuff on homosexuality”, when the revisions were announced. I believe the stance we take is that the state has no role in the private lives of the people. In my opinion, the Criminal Code does not apply to what occurs between consenting adults in a private setting. There is a difference between private and public information, or between a juvenile and an

adult [24]. There were no same-sex marriage until 2005, when the law was changed. Why have homosexuals and other sexual minorities been subject to persecution by the majority? Critical sociology addresses this question.

In the critical sociology perspective, the idea of “sexuality” itself is an important aspect of social inequality based on sexuality. Knowledge and power are intertwined with sexuality. The term “gay” was used in the late 1800s to describe a sexual “invert.” Despite the fact that this definition was labelled “scientific,” it was still heavily influenced by the prevailing cultural values and biases of the time. The emerging scientific fields of biology and psychiatry contributed to the theory that homosexuals had an inherent, aberrant “inversion” of sexual drive [25]. Closeted sexuality and homophobic violence have a long history in part due to the significant normative limitations based on the scientific division between natural and unnatural forms of sexuality that evolved in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were predicated on the intersection of scientific knowledge, which viewed homosexuals as an abnormal group of people, and new developments in medical, psychiatric, legal, and state authority.

Sexual identity is viewed as a kind of power because of its apparent “naturalness,” and this is part of the issue. To the extent that they fit inside the dominant gender paradigm, gender and sexual identity only appear natural to those who do not perceive them in that way. Like other ideologies, the prevailing gender schema helps to maintain power and status inequities. Male and female are the only two alternatives that may be generated by sex, according to this schema. Gender, on the other hand, is a social or psychological characteristic that demonstrates or exhibits sex. Both male and female genders have the same two possibilities. “There is no such thing as a non-binary individual. No one can be both neither. It's not possible for someone to be both at once. Gender transition requires considerable medical intervention and is not possible for everybody [26].

This comes as no surprise to many individuals. It's an obvious choice. However, if one's gender identification does not conform to the current gender paradigm, the legitimacy of one's gender identity is questioned. External authorities and specialists play a major role in this, defining people who don't fit as either natural mistakes or the result of socialisation failures and personal psychopathology. When a girl isn't feminine enough or a guy isn't manly enough, friends and family members express concern or disapproval. In addition, those that don't fit have concerns. Their sense of self-worth may be undermined if they begin to wonder why social standards don't reflect it. Matters defined in the context of social power relations are critical sociology's focus.

Symbolic Interactionism

The work of interactionists is primarily concerned with the social and psychological implications of one's sexuality and sexual orientation. Because culture in North America has devalued femininity, people who acquire feminine traits face criticism, especially for boys or males. Heterosexuality, like masculinity, has come to symbolise normalcy in the same way.

Vivienne Cass describes a series of social phases as a series of identity confusions and identity comparisons that the individual must investigate to find which one best explains his or her sense of self [27]. You can of course get trapped in one step or travel backwards between these stages if you like. These adjustments are especially challenging for homosexuals.

When it comes to heterosexuals, how much of the same applies? Coming out as heterosexual is not silly in and of itself, but the absurdity is rooted in the deeply established conventions of heteronormative society, which make the absurdity appear natural. Having a gender or sexuality can be developed through the same social processes, but society's acceptance of the resultant identities may differ.

Other Interactionist interests include how sexuality is typically described in terms of the sex lives of gay men and women; in certain situations, the assumption that homosexuals, especially males, are deviant and/or hypersexual is made. The insults used to denigrate homosexuals might be a topic of interactionism. Homosexual males are commonly referred to as “queens” or “fags” because they are feminised by these labels. As a result, homosexuals have a distorted view of their own identity. As a reminder, Cooley's “looking-glass self” argues that one's self is formed by one's own perception and appraisal of the reactions of others [28]. If you've been subjected to homophobic jokes and labels, you may have developed a poor self-image or ego. Gay and bisexual adolescents who face significant levels of social rejection are twice as likely to suffer from major depression and eight times more likely to make an attempt on their own lives, according to the CDC [29].

Thus to sum up when it comes down to it, queer theory aims to open the door to new scientific understanding of sexuality and gender.

Gender, sex, and sexuality have all been topics of discussion in this study. Sex, gender and sexual orientation can only be comprehended and critically examined if they are distinguished from one another.

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