

Approaches to the Study of Gender and Women

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Abstract:

Today I am going to deliberate on the topic “Approaches to the study of gender”, Before discussing the main objectives, it is important to define the term Gender. Ridgeway and smith Loving describes gender as a system of social practices that creates and maintains gender distinctions and organizes relations of inequality on the basis of these distinctions. Thus within the social system, the social practices operate in gendered ways thereby creating destinations and inequalities.

Genders a relational term, which means that man-woman and masculine-feminine and mutually constituted and interdependent. Gender is being continually produced and reproduced which means that it is much as a process than a fixed state.

Amy S Wharton views that, “By understanding gender, we understand more about the social world”.

“Women’s structural position and consequent experiences are not the same as men’s and that sexual difference is therefore an important explanatory variable”.

Objectives:

1. To study how sex differences creates gender inequalities.
2. To link gender inequalities with Individualistic perspective.
3. To understand how gender is constructed in everyday lives.
4. To link gender in everyday life with Interactionism perspective.
5. To explorer how gender matters for all of us.

Sex Differences creates Gender Inequalities:

Sex makes us male and female. On the other hand gender is an achieved status and makes us masculine and feminine. The first person who makes difference between sex and gender is Robert Stoller (1968) in his book Sex and Gender. The Development of Masculinity and Femenity.

Individualistic Approach:

This means that sex imposes constraints on gender. These constraints come primarily from different reproductive roles of women and men i.e. biological. Thus those who believe gender as an attribute of individuals tend to accept that there are some differences between sex categories, which are stable across situations. Individualists try to understand gender through the lens of sex, which means sex category sets into motion sex specific processes of socialization. The socialization process in turn transforms the “raw material” of biological sex into gender differentiated personalities and behaviors. The process of learning the social practices associated with gender is called gender socialization.

Gender socialization:

Is the process by which the individuals take on the gendered qualities and characteristics and acquire a sense of self. Also through socialization an individual learns to behave in appropriate situations as expected for each sex category in the society.

The process of socialization can be elaborated further by

- Social learning
- Cognitive approach
- Identification theory

Identification theory:

This theory also tries to explain socialization process but is different from social learning and cognitive approach. This theory explicitly talks about gender, gender identity and sexuality. Identification theory is best explained by the work of Nancy Chodorow in “the reproduction of Mothering”. Chodorow focuses on how men and women develop a personal sense of what it means to be a male or a female. The theory looks at gender identity as formed during early childhood as children develop emotional attachment to the same sex parent or adult. Child is always more attached to mother as all the needs required in the infant stage are fulfilled by her but as the stage progresses a child starts developing ego boundaries.

Construction of Gender in Everyday Lives:

There are varieties of sociological and feminist approaches to study gender in everyday life. Lorber (1994) argued that gender is an institution that is embedded in all the social processes and social organizations of everyday life. She further argued that gender difference is primarily a means to justify sexual stratification. Thus stratification is the basis for the construction of gender.

Interactionist perspective:

This approach stresses more on interaction of individuals rather than individuals only. They place importance to the forces operating outside the individual. In contrast to the individualists we see human traits and behaviors relatively stable, interactionist argue that people's reaction and behaviors vary in response to the social context. Gender matters as it shapes identities and behavioral dispositions of individuals. It matters as it shapes interaction. It matters as it organizes social institutions.

Conclusion:

In today's lecture, I have discussed how gender is different from sex and how the difference which is based on biology can create inequalities. This has been explained by individualistic perspective through the medium of Social learning. Cognitive approach and Status characteristic theory. Differentiating sex which as an ascribed status with the gender which is an achieved status. And how its construction takes place in everyday lives. This was explained with the help of interactionist perspective by linking it with what was explained with Doing gender, Status characteristic theory and Homophily. Placing gender within social structure has been explained through institutional perspective by giving an example of Gendered institutions.

References:

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