

Gender and Doing Gender

Gender can be defined as the characteristics associated with men and women based on biological distinctions, this concept of “gender” has been around since the beginning of time, as well as the roles and responsibilities assigned based on gender. Society has specific views on gender and the roles that each gender is expected to play, this is also known as *doing gender*, which is extremely deterring the advancement of society and feminism.

The biological differences between men and women have always been noted, including physical differences, behavioral, and psychological differences. Some physical differences include; the difference in pelvic opening, shoulder width, muscle mass, head shape, height, body hair, vocal pitch, and many more. In relation to psychological differences, the male and female brains have significant and minor differences which can affect cognitive function and behavior. These differences include; a larger corpus callosum in women, overall brain size is larger in men, a larger hippocampus in women, a larger amygdala is larger in men, and many other differences. As far as the behavioral/ mental effects these have on individuals may vary. According to Stanford Medicine, “Women, it’s known, retain stronger, more vivid memories of emotional events than men do” (Goldman 2017). These differences between males and females affect behavioral, social, and cultural roles and societal treatment.

These differences formulate the poor treatment of women all over the world, there are innumerable examples of discriminatory practices against women in history. In 1949, Simone De Beauvoir, a feminist activist, wrote a book titled “The Second Sex”, which theorized and discussed the idea that women are seen and treated as the *other* sex. This enforces the idea that women are inferior to men, and also supports and advances the patriarchy. The idea of women as the *other* is exemplified by the constant discrimination through history against women based

girls. The discrimination against women is not specifically targeted towards women assigned female at birth, sexism can occur to transgender women and intersex peoples as well. This is a good example of what gender really is and how it is viewed in society; whatever an individual chooses to present themselves as. There is a vast difference between gender and sex, majority of the time, sex is only important for official documents and medical proceedings. Gender is the main concept by which individuals are classified.

The World Health Organization defines sex as “the different biological and physiological characteristics of females, males and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs”(WHO), whereas the organization defines gender as “the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time”(WHO). Furthermore, an individual can change their gender and/or present themselves as a different gender, or may choose to not be associated with any gender at all. Individuals can choose to change the appearance of the exterior of the body and/or genitalia, through surgery or other methods, and can even have hormones injected into the body in order to assist the change of gender. However, the physiological and internal processes associated with each sex cannot be completely eradicated or changed, due to the fact that sex is genetically determined at fertilization in utero, sex is not a social construct like gender.

The performance specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations society has assigned to each gender is also known as *doing gender*. This concept can provide a sense of identity and security for people, however this seems to be the only benefit, as it is primarily harmful to

between the genders can be described as “Men supporting and guiding with advice and wisdom, while women help by nurturing and caring”(Ramos 2023). Exemplifying the fact that men are seen as superior to women, men are seen as smart, protective, brave, whereas women are supposed to be sweet, caring, and submissive. As far as physical traits, men are expected to be tall, muscular, physically fit, and women are expected to be petite, curvaceous, manicured, etc. In addition to these characteristics, women have always been expected to stay home, and take care of the home and children, while the man goes out earns money and completes the “hard” tasks. Women are expected to cook and take care of their man, be submissive and listen and obey their man. Unfortunately, women have historically been at a disadvantage in all aspects of life, not even being able to vote or work at certain times in history. Even today, there is still an equality gap that has yet to close.

Gender is a social construct that has been slowly changing over time, nowadays gender is as flexible as it has ever been. However, there are still harmful gender roles that are halting the advancement and evolution of a high functioning and equal society.

“Gender and Health.” *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1. Accessed 1 May 2024.

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