The Gender Construct:

*intro: types of motions

- Sex is biological while gender roles are not inherent to biological makeup, rather they are a social construct.

- Sociology professor, Judith Lorber states that although we tend to assume gender is an inherent trait, it is actually "Constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life"

- Individuals are given gendered identities when their sex is determined at birth (Lorber 1994). These identities are then further ingrained through treatment from others according to gender, gendered norms around sexual activities, and gendered roles in parenting as well as in the workplace (Lorber 1994). Norms cause people to think they should act certain ways and occupy certain positions based on these gendered identities.

- According to Lorber, people use gender as a means of organising society and assigning people to different societal tasks (1994). Each society classifies male and female children, girls and boys ready for marriage, and mature men and women (Lorber 1994). These groups into which people are categorised influence their life experiences and thus, shape their goals, feelings and characteristics (Lorber 1994). Groups include normative ideas of what each role ought to do and how they ought to behave.

- Norms include romantic relationships and how people ought to act within these relationships (also heteronormative). Pressure to be desirable to the male gaze:

- "Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that you're strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it" - Margaret Atwood

- Pressure to do certain things to be desirable based in male fantasies e.g. when magazines focus on giving girls advice on how to be noticed by boys

Problems with how the construct affects norms:

Femininity and women seen as inferior:

- The categorisation of people according to the gender binary not only places them in groups but allows for unequal treatment based on these groups. The patriarchy deems women the inferior group, and this means women are treated as less important members of society.

- Prevalence of women being interrupted by men during social conversations, for example, shows the extent to which the idea of women being less important is ingrained in people's minds.

- Ideas of femininity are associated with: weakness, irrationality, hysteria, vapidness/lack of intellect. Things seen as feminine are not taken seriously. Queer men also stereotyped as feminine and mistreated on similar grounds.

Restricts autonomy and choice

- Autonomy (capacity to make own decisions) can be harmed by gendered norms, as norms cause pressure/coercion to act a certain way. Acting against the norm may be inaccessible or cause ostracization.

- On the other hand, of idea of rejecting norms can also go against choice e.g some women enjoy make-up independently of the male gaze.

Impact of maximising autonomy and choice: to do with people's own preferences, values and ideas of a good life – following these leads to individual happiness and sense of fulfilment. Also forms a factor of women' liberation and rights, as well as political, economic, personal, and social equality.

Priorities of Feminism Based on Context and Intersectionality

Intersectionality: Kimberle Crenshaw

"[…] this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class"

"If, as this analysis asserts, history and context determine the utility of identity politics, how then do we understand identity politics today, especially in light of our recognition of multiple dimensions of identity? More specifically, what does it mean to argue that gender identities have been obscured in antiracist discourses, just as race identities have been obscured in feminist discourses? Does that mean we cannot talk about identity? Or instead, that any discourse about identity has to acknowledge how our identities are constructed through the intersection of multiple dimensions? A beginning response to these questions requires that we first recognize that the organized identity groups in which we find ourselves in are in fact coalitions, or at least potential coalitions waiting to be formed"

"Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics"

- Those for whom the feminist movement advocates may have different needs/interests based on context

Worked Example: GBV in SA

Stats according to M&G:

- In 2019/20, 53 293 sexual offences were reported, an average of 146 per day, up from 52 420 in 2018/19. Most of these were cases of rape. Of this the police recorded 42 289 rapes in 2019/20, up from 41 583 in 2018/19, an average of 116 rapes each day (SAPS Crime Stats).

- In 2019/20, a total of 2 695 women were murdered in South Africa. This means a woman is murdered every three hours.

- Femicide is five times higher in South Africa than the global average, with South Africa having the fourth-highest female interpersonal violence death rate out of the 183 countries listed by the WHO in 2016.

- High number of cases of partner violence.

- Both independently of other crimes and in conjunction with other crimes such as theft.

- Linked to ideas of ingrained patriarchal ideas and gendered power dynamics: idea of owning women and punishing women who resist e.g. resisting sexual advances or trying to end relationships.

Effects on everyday lives:

- women not going out alone, especially at night

- not taking public transport

Problems in Media Reporting of GBV:

-tendency to draw on trope of Black men as violent

- poorer areas characterised as violent and sites of social ills such as alcoholism and unemployment. Apartheid legacy means white people have had more access to affluent areas.

- Media coverage linked to social ills rather than misogyny and sexism

- Newsworthy reports implying some victims more worthy of attention than others.

- heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, attractive white women seen as a metaphor for "innocence."

- headlines with the idea women are culpable for their own murders if they consume alcohol