

The terms employed most frequently to describe the differences between men and women are 'sex' and 'gender'. Sex refers to the differing physical attributes of women and men (Lee, Shaw). The categories of sex are male and female. In every society sex differences are given social meanings. Social identity, which is confessed on the basis of assumed sexual differences, is called "gender" (Lee, Shaw). People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys, who grow into men and women. Males are supposed to be masculine, strong, and macho, while females are attributed to be feminine, fragile, and nurturing. To be born a man or a woman in any society is more than a simple biological fact. It is a biological fact with social implications. "Gender" is the term now widely used to refer to those ways in which a culture reformulates what begins as a fact of nature (Lee, Shaw). The biological sexes are redefined, represented, valued, and channeled into different roles in various culturally dependent ways.

For most people, gender and physical characteristics are the same, unchangeable and 'natural', and there is also a general perception that gender refers to women only. But this is not the case. Gender differences refer to culturally formed traits of masculinity and femininity, that is, the characteristic forms of behavior expected respectively of men and women in any given culture (Lee, Shaw). Gender differences are by no means determined by sex differences. They are social and cultural rather than biological differences. Thus, gender differences are to be found in the modes of dress and speech, the behavioral patterns, the roles, the emotions, the skills, and so on, and are related to other differences such as race, ethnicity, class, nation and others (Lee, Shaw). Gender differences, in spite of being constructed in complex ways, are not unchangeable. In reality masculinity and femininity are not fixed categories acquired in childhood but are constantly being tested, challenged and reworked. To this, one could add that most aspects related to gender differences over time vary and have changed across cultures.

The pressure of gender conformity can be very strongly felt by both girls and boys. In the case of girls, the pressures on some in relation to body image lead to anorexia and death. In addition, girls are faced with a maze of decisions about whether to be like a girl in this situation, or like a boy in that situation-and are often damned in either. In the case of boys, the key aspects of dominant masculinity are clearly in evidence in any classroom in which there are boys. It is based on being strong and rough, on learning to take it, on being first or the best, on disassociating from girls or boys whose identity does not 'pass the test' of macho maleness, on not showing affection, and on defying authority, especially female authority. All these things serve to prove acceptable masculinity. Boys create and preserve this masculinity through fear of whatever might be constructed as female, since whatever masculinity is constructed is better than femininity (Lee, Shaw). This creates problems for both boys and girls.

Nowadays, the significance and pervasiveness of gender differences remain. However, in the last two decades or so, the distinction between sex and gender differences became clear. Since it allowed a strategic use for such distinction, feminists have countered claims that differences between women and men are natural, and that women's social roles result from physical capacities. This was a major achievement for the Women's Movement in its search for the truth and the emancipation of women (Lee, Shaw). Actually, by speaking of "gender" as the culturally and historically variable, which are attributed to "sex", feminists were to argue that those meanings could be changed. In the recent past, equal opportunities legislation was enacted in many countries and the voice of the Women's Movement is heard criticizing sexism in every sphere of society (Lee, Shaw). Nevertheless, the reality has shown that, despite some improvement in women's situation, there is a long way to go.

Gender construction differs from culture to culture. Many countries, where religion plays the biggest role on the role of men and women have yet to progress as well as North American Countries in respect to gender construction (Lee, Shaw). In places like Iraq, a highly Muslim population, women are viewed as inferior to men and their sole purpose is to stay home and take care of the home and children. The men are the providers and hold the power. Women are not to speak unless spoken to and are considered weak and unimportant in the hierarchy. In places such as China, women and girls are treated like second-class citizens. If a woman bears a baby girl society is disappointed and more often than not, the baby girls are put up for adoption. In many cultures, gender represents a clear relation of power (Lee, Shaw). The purpose of marriage is to secure such power. It is of crucial importance to men to control the institution of the family as a unit of social organization. Thus, to ensure male authority within the family marriage is necessary. As you can see, gender construction varies from country to country. Some countries have not yet reached the level of equality we have accomplished in the United States.

In the United States, gender construction can be identified in several institutions. In the government women are seen in secretarial and second hand positions whereas men have the more predominant roles. In education, society also renders inequality in genders. For example, the mirror image position would equate the under-representation of boys in the humanities to the under-representation of girls in mathematics and sciences (Lee, Shaw). This overlooks the fact that science and mathematics are at the top of the academic hierarchy of subjects, and can provide bright students with the highest tertiary entrance scores and thus privileged access to the university courses that bring the highest economic and status rewards. In other words success in mathematics can bring with it individual economic rewards. These traits are most commonly attached to males. On the other hand, success in the humanities does not, in general, lead to high

paying, high status jobs, but can increase students' capacity for understanding people, society and the pressing social issues which those who get the high status jobs will have to solve. That is, success in the humanities will not necessarily bring individual economic and status rewards. However, it will benefit others because it will increase the capacity of individuals to understand and respond justly to social issues and interpersonal relationships. These traits are most commonly attached to females.

In the family, although we are moving away from this, women are seen as the homemakers and caregivers whereas men are seen as the moneymakers who provide security. Everything, which takes place in all areas of social life, is based on power. Historically power emerges consistent with sex relations and class relations in a patriarchal order (Lee, Shaw). As a result of sex relation's men are dominant and women are subservient. This is so because women reproduce and for the reason that they reproduce women within patriarchy appear 'naturally inferior to men' (Lee, Shaw). In accordance with these roles of sexual division of labor take place within the family unit. Thus, within the family men exert power over women. Gender has to be seen within this context, since power is implicated in gendered and cultural relations. In sports, men are viewed as "real" athletes and their sports are highly more recognized and respected than women's sports. A man who plays rough contact sports is thought to be a "real" man and women who play contact sports are considered a "butch" or not "lady like". These are just some of the ways in which society constructs what it means to be male or female.

While it is important to focus on the way in which gender is created anew in individuals as they respond to social processes and practices, this process of creation needs to be read in the context of broader social processes. Gender is also a vital element of the social structures such as

the economy, government, mass media and schooling (Lee, Shaw). The everyday actions of individuals are shaped by their position in relation to these broader social structures. The most important point about all this is that individuals are not passively socialized into a gendered identity. It is, in general, a great deal more fluid and unpredictable than that. However, even though individuals make active choices, these choices are still constrained by gender boundaries, which may be different in different circumstances.