

THE CONCEPT OF GENDER AND RELATED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Considering the fact that society treats women and men differently by assigning different characteristics, roles and responsibilities, the increasing number of studies on the causes of these differences has drawn attention to the concepts of "sex" and "gender".

The concept of gender can be named as the stereotypes, judgments and prejudices acquired by the individual regarding gender during the socialization process, unlike the biological sex of the person. Gender is a socio-cultural phenomenon that emerges with the socialization process of the individual.

The concept of gender is used to express the qualities built within the complex social relations network, the meanings attributed to femininity and masculinity, and the behaviors expected from them, apart from the concept of gender, which denotes the biological characteristics that define men and women.

In this study, sex, gender roles, Gender equality/ Gender inequality and related theoretical approaches will be discussed in order to better understand the concept of gender.

Keywords: Sex, Gender, Gender Role, Gender equality/ Gender inequality, Theoretical Framework

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UDK: 159.922.8:616.89-008.441

Date of received:
01.07.2022

Date of acceptance:
26.08.2022

Declaration of interest:

The authors reported no conflict of interest related to this article.

Introduction

Considering the fact that society treats women and men differently by assigning different characteristics, roles and responsibilities, the increasing number of studies on the causes of these differences has drawn attention to the concepts of "sex" and "gender".

Studies conducted in the context of gender show that the ongoing gender stereotypes in societies affect women negatively; underlines that it reinforces the subordinate position of women and reproduces discrimination based on gender. Another point that gender studies draw attention to is the active role of women in reproducing and reinforcing these processes that are against them (Zeybekoğlu Dündar, 2012).

The concept of gender can be named as the stereotypes, judgments and prejudices acquired by the individual regarding gender during the socialization process, unlike the biological sex of the person. Gender is a socio-cultural phenomenon that emerges with the socialization process of the individual. Gender concept, which implies the culturally determined roles and responsibilities of men and women, varies across different cultures and in time. Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other.

As it is known, the biological sex of people is natural, their gender, in short, the roles and stereotypes assigned to people as men and women are socio-cultural. It is very difficult to separate biological sex and gender completely from each other, because it has been stated that what culture expects men and women to do is not completely independent of their biological sex.

The concept of gender is a human invention, learned and therefore can change. It may differ from society to society, from one place to another, from one time to another. Society treats men and women differently; assigns them different characteristics, behaviors, duties.

Gender is one of the fundamental ways in which the social life of human beings is organized. Indeed, one of the first questions people ask when they hear of a birth is whether the child is a boy or a girl.

Sex and Gender Concepts

Undoubtedly, the first thing to do when starting a study on gender is to define the concepts of sex and gender and to reveal the distinction between them.

In the scholarly literature, the following objective definitions are common: sex indicates the biological status of male or female, whereas gender is a label used to indicate characteristics that are believed to be learned and acquired by males or females as a result of social experience (Galambos, 2004). While sex is acquired at birth; gender, which is a concept related to how society sees us, how it perceives us, how it thinks and how it expects us to behave as men and women, is learned during the socialization process. Gender is defined as keeping women in lower positions than men in social, cultural, political and economic fields (Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2002). While the concept of gender emphasizes our biological, physiological and psychological characteristics, that is, the characteristics that are with us from the moment we are born, the concept of gender roles emphasizes the cultural characteristics attributed to male and female genders (Ersoy, 2009).

The concept of gender refers to the meanings and expectations that society and culture impose on being a woman or a man; it meets a cultural structure and generally includes the psychological characteristics associated with the biological structure of the individual (Yaşın Dökmen, 2015). Gender is a concept used to distinguish socially and culturally determined sex from biological sex; It points out the socialization process and the characteristics of being a woman and a man acquired in the culture, defines the socially determined roles and responsibilities of women and men, and determines their positions and behaviors in society (Altınova and Duyan, 2013). The society in which the baby is born shapes it according to the behavioral patterns it deems appropriate for men and women. Accordingly, everything from children's diets, clothes, toys to books, textbooks, cartoons and computer games they encounter when they take their first steps to school, are loaded with images that are assumed to be suitable for both genders (Gümüšoğlu, 2006, cited in Özgür, 2010).

Gender values and practices, which started with the preference of pink for the things of girls and blue for the items of baby boys, continue throughout life. For example, all orders and behaviors created from the

moment a baby learns that it is a boy aim to shape its gender. In this way, the individual grows by learning to be a woman or a man. They play the roles assigned to their genders and have to shape their lives according to this order.

Gender roles

The term role is a sociological term borrowed from theatre. Role indicates the position of the individual in an organized social structure, the responsibilities and privileges associated with that position, and the rules governing interaction with people in other positions. Different roles such as motherhood, fatherhood, teaching, neighbor, worker can be mentioned. The different roles given to women and men are known as gender roles. Women and men are expected to "play" their roles, adhering to the "script" written by society. The term gender roles is used to reflect gender stereotypes or gender differences determined by society (Yaşın Dökmen, 2015). Gender roles certainly overlap with gender stereotypes, but stereotypes are attitudes about members of a group, and roles are behaviors that people engage in, characteristics or attributes that they possess, or positions they hold in a society (Blakemore, et al. 2009).

Gender roles are a concept that reveals how women and men should behave and the different tasks that are expected of them, just because they are women or men. In all societies, there are a series of socio-cultural values that separate men and women from each other and form their social roles, and they have a feature that shapes, directs and controls individuals. The individual internalizes gender-based roles at every stage of the socialization process (Zeybekoğlu Dündar, 2012).

Gender roles, as one of the collective identity categories that emerge depending on how the differences between women and men are perceived socially, include socially constructed "expectations" due to the status responsibilities that the gender category imposes on individuals (Zeybekoğlu, 2013).

According to the literature, gender roles show significant differences, especially in the roles of men and women in working life, social life and family life. When the reflections of gender roles on working life are examined; Roles such as working in jobs with lower status and wages and getting permission from their husbands to work are considered

appropriate for women. In social life; There are judgments such as women not going out alone at night and women not living alone. Looking at family life; If women are subjected to violence by their husbands, they are expected to hide this situation, and to take care of things such as child care and cleaning at home (Yılmaz et al. 2009) . The above-mentioned discriminations regarding work, family, marriage and social life negatively affect the social status of women. For this reason, women could not reach the desired status in the society and lag behind men in many areas, resulting in an inequality between the sexes. No discussion of gender roles would be complete without a discussion of the differential power and status of males and females. As adults, men in general have more legal, economic, and political power and higher social status than women in general, although there are some obvious exceptions. The economic provider role has more power and status than the homemaker role, and female-dominated occupations are generally lower in status, power, and pay than male-dominated occupations (Eagly et al., 2000, cited in Blakemore et al. 2009).

Gender equality/ Gender inequality

Women and girls represent half of the world's population. Gender equality, as well as being a fundamental human right, is essential to achieving peaceful societies with full human potential and sustainable development. In addition, it has been determined that the empowerment of women is an important element in promoting productivity and economic growth.

Gender equality is a global norm and embodies various standards for ensuring gender mainstreaming, women empowerment, elimination of discrimination against women, gender-balanced decision making or state responsibility for gender-based violence and stereotyping.

Gender equality means that women and men have equal rights and opportunities in both public and private spheres, and both participate equally in these fields. However, neither in our country nor anywhere else in the world can we talk about the existence of gender equality in this sense. For example, research shows that in no country in the world, women cannot fully benefit from the rights and opportunities that men have (Gültekin et al. 2013).

One of the main phenomena caused by gender inequality is violence against women. Gender-based violence against women is defined as gender-based violence that is “directed against a woman simply because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately” (Demirgöz Bal, 2016).

According to OECD 2019 data, the country with the highest rate of violence against women in the world is Pakistan with 85%. This rate is 78 percent in Senegal, 67 percent in Yemen and 61 percent in Afghanistan. Among OECD countries, Canada has the lowest rate of male violence against women with 2 percent. Just above it is Chile with 7 percent and Switzerland with 10 percent (<https://tr.euronews.com>).

Although many theories and approaches have been developed on gender, the biggest common denominator of these theories is that the issue of gender is a universal feature in almost all human societies. On the other hand, gender content is quite diverse and diverse. While gender existed in some form in every society, it gained a universal quality as well as a cultural feature. The existence of gender in every society also prevented equality between men and women, that is, between the sexes (Çelik, 2008).

Despite the efforts made around the world in order to ensure equality between the sexes and to eliminate gender discrimination, the desired level has not been reached yet. Despite all these facts, the situation regarding gender equality is changing, sometimes slowly and at other times accelerating. In order to prevent gender discrimination all over the world, the underlying causes of discrimination against girls should be identified and tried to be eliminated. From the moment they are born, children should be brought up without bringing their gender to the fore.

The problem of gender inequality is a universal and historical problem and is the subject of various studies in which international comparisons are made. When we evaluate the data of 2020 from the World Economic Forum-Global Gender Equality Reports; It is seen that North Macedonia ranks 70th out of 153 countries in terms of gender equality (WEF, 2020).

Gender Theories

Biological Theory

Biological theory argues that the main reason for psychological and behavioral changes between men and women is biological differences (Miller, 2016). According to this view, hormonal differences constitute gender differences and femininity is identified with motherhood and masculinity with power. Those who adopt the biological approach argue that a completely equal society cannot exist, and according to them, people have an innate capacity. They can improve their abilities within this capacity (Özgür, 2010).

The biological approach argues that the difference between men and women is in their biological nature. In this view, it is argued that the different reproductive roles of men and women lead to differences and division of labor between the sexes, that is, hormonal differences create gender differences, and femininity is identified with motherhood and masculinity with power. For this reason, those who adopt the biological approach argue that a completely equal society cannot exist, and according to them, people have an innate capacity. They can develop their abilities within these capacities. They cannot do more because their biological nature does not allow it (Suğur, Demiray ve Eşkinat, 2006).

According to this discipline, human beings, like other species, have developed ways to carry their own genes to the future and to keep their genetic characteristics alive for generations. According to this view, gender roles have emerged for this purpose (Dökmen, 2015).

Social learning theory

Social learning theory was developed by Bandura. The concept of gender was integrated into this theory by Mischel (1970) (Lott & Maluso, 1993; cited in Yaşın Yaşın Dökmen, 2015; Miller, 2016).

Social learning theory talks about observing, internalizing, transforming the attitudes and behaviors of other people around us, and transforming the perception of gender, which consists of gender differences, into behavior when appropriate. Another situation that affects behavior is the possibility of others exhibiting the same or similar behaviors as a result of reinforcement or punishment of the individuals exhibiting the behavior (Kes, 2022).

According to social learning theory, children's learning of gender roles occurs through rewards or punishments for their behaviors. For example, a boy may be rewarded by his parents when he plays with a toy car, but punished by his parents when he plays with a more feminine doll. Thus, the child learns to behave in accordance with the gender role (Dönger, 2022). The child can learn by modeling as well as learning with reward and punishment. For example, when the child observes that the teacher in kindergarten rewards a group of boys for playing with a toy car, or that there is no girl in this group playing with a toy car, her behavior is reinforced in accordance with gender roles. (Miller, 2016; Ruble et al., 2007).

Social learning theory emphasizes that the child acquires behaviors that are appropriate or unsuitable for the gender role by rewarding and punishing, and it is also important to observe and take an example (Pehlivan, 2017).

Social Cognitive Theory

In social cognitive theory, the development of gender is explained by triple reciprocal causation. In the model of triadic reciprocal causation, personal factors, behavioral patterns and environmental events are considered together. Personal factors; cognitive, emotional, and biological phenomena, gender-related conceptualizations, behavioral and judgmental standards, and self-regulating effects. Behavior refers to patterns of activity linked to gender. Environmental factors, on the other hand, show a wide network of social effects encountered in daily life (Yaşın Dökmen, 2015).

Three types of sociocognitive effects are mentioned in the development of gender: modeling, direct experience and teaching. Their effects vary, depending on the developmental status of individuals and the social construction of experiences. Accordingly, the effects of each of them are greater in some developmental periods. For example, modeling is present from birth and the baby is very open to learning through modeling. Three types of sociocognitive effects are mentioned in the development of gender: modeling, direct experience and teaching. Their relative effects vary depending on the developmental status of individuals and the social construction of experiences. Accordingly, the effects of each of them are greater in some developmental periods. For example,

modeling is present from birth and the baby is very open to learning through modeling. (Yaşın Dökmen, 2015).

Cognitive Development Theory

Cognitive development theory is an important theory that we need to consider when explaining gender. Piaget and Kohlberg are the pioneers of this theory. Largely focused on explaining gender development in the childhood years, Kohlberg asserted that children are active processors of information and that they categorize individuals (including themselves) according to gender (Galambos, 2004).

According to Kohlberg, achieving gender constancy is a critical milestone in gender development. The idea of gender constancy is analogous to Piaget's concept of conservation of physical properties in that gender constancy refers to understanding that gender is an invariant human property that is stable across time and superficial changes in appearance. Kohlberg outlined three developmental stages that children achieve in order to have gender constancy. The [first stage](#), gender identity, is children's basic awareness that they are either boys or girls. The [second stage](#), gender stability, refers to the recognition that gender identity does not change over time. The [third stage](#), gender consistency, represents the achievement of gender constancy and refers to the understanding that gender is not changed by transformations in gender-typed appearances, activities, and traits. In other words, once children achieve gender constancy, at about age 6–7 years, they understand that they are either a girl or a boy (gender identity), that they will grow up to be an adult of the same gender (i.e., a woman or a man) (gender stability), and that their gender will not be changed if they do things such as put on opposite sex-typed clothes (gender consistency), (Ruble ve diğ. 2007; Yaşın Dökmen, 2015; Miller, 2016). Kohlberg emphasized that children's knowledge about gender progresses through three stages, and that children come to guide their own gender development because of valuing things in the environment that they perceive to be for them (e.g., a boy comes to like playing with trucks because he comes to think that trucks are for someone like him—a boy), (Blakemore et al. 2009).

Due to her age, she makes choices in accordance with the gender stereotype and they are appreciated in this direction. As children begin to understand the concept of gender, they try to act in accordance with the

rules of that gender. Contrary to social learning theory, this motivation to act appropriately is internal rather than extrinsic. (Miller, 2016).

Ecological Theory

The research of a group of researchers discussing and examining the ecological context of gender development in the family shows how parental work roles, parental gender attitudes, the presence of siblings in the family influence gender notion. Children, especially girls, are more likely to hold traditional gender roles when their parents have traditional gender attitudes, their mothers do not work outside the home, and there are children of both sexes in the family. Bronfenbrenner encouraged him to contextualize children's development, to examine children's natural environments, and to understand how complex human development processes really are. His theoretical view has been very convincing to developmental psychologists. It is possible to say that there is much to be learned about the ecological context of children's gender development, as it has produced research on many processes involved in children's gender development (Blakemore et al. 2009).

In the 1970s, developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner proposed an ecological theory of children's development. Bronfenbrenner conceptualized children's development as being influenced by a series of processes involving the child and the environment. Bronfenbrenner considered the environment as a set of nested systems or layers, with the child at the center. Bronfenbrenner refers to the child's actual environment as the microsystem. The microsystem consists of the actual interactions the child experiences. These experiences may be in the family, or with other children in the neighborhood or at school, with teachers and others. There are several processes in the microsystem that might influence this aspect of gender development. Parents put more pressure on boys to control certain emotions, especially sadness or fearfulness and they are less likely to talk about emotions that signal vulnerability with boys. In addition, they respond differently to emotional behavior in boys and girls, attending more to sadness and fearfulness in girls and to anger in boys—giving the emotional behavior of boys and girls a different payoff or reward (Blakemore et al. 2009).

After the microsystem, the next layer in Bronfenbrenner's ecological system is the mesosystem. This refers to the interactions or

connections among the various parts of the environment that affect the child. In terms of children's social development in general, Bronfenbrenner held that children were likely to develop best when there were strong, consistent, and supportive relationships among the significant parts of the child's environment. For gender development, it has examined the attitudes or sexist behaviors of children who have consistent or inconsistent influences on important people and institutions in their lives (Blakemore et al. 2009).

Bronfenbrenner's next layer is the exosystem. This system refers to experiences that the child does not take part in directly, but that may impact on the child indirectly. A good example of the exosystem consists of experiences that parents have outside the family that may affect the parents' interactions with their children. Parents' influences at work or school (e.g., if they return to or continue in school after their children are born) may influence how they treat their children (Blakemore et al. 2009).

The next layer in Bronfenbrenner's system is the macrosystem. This refers to the general cultural context of development. This could be as narrow as social class in a particular country, or the entire culture of a group, a nation or even the world. Clearly, for gender development the significant changes in gender attitudes and gender roles that have taken place over the past several decades is potentially important. There is certainly evidence that attitudes about gender and family roles have changed over the last few decades will be an important part of the macrosystem's impact on children's gender development (Blakemore et al. 2009).

The final part of Bronfenbrenner's system is the chronosystem. This refers to chronological change, either in the child or the environment. The cultural context may change, the child's family moves or has another child, the mother gets a job outside the home—all of these events change the ecology of the child's development. One particularly important part of the chronosystem is the child's age (Blakemore et al. 2009). Perceptions about gender are transforming as a part of the process of social change and the influence of all social institutions, especially the family, is seen in the process of gaining gender. If we evaluate it in terms of ecological theory, all codes related to the concept of gender are acquired almost from the first years of life and can affect the individual in every period of his life.

Gender schema Theory

Gender schema theory, which is considered as one of the important explanations about how children acquire thoughts and behaviors related to gender, was developed by Sandra Lipsitz Bem by combining the basic views of social learning and cognitive development theories (Dökmen, 2015). Gender schema theorists ask how and when children learn gender schemas, what kind of information they learn, and how their knowledge influences their behavior (Blakemore et al. 2009). It is possible to define the schema, which is the basic structure of the theory, as a cognitive structure that makes sense or directs the thoughts of the individual. The information, terms, and judgments received for the creation of the schema must be related to the schema. Any information obtained on the subject is processed by subjecting it to femininity and masculinity classifications in the gender schema (Kes, 2022).

According to gender schema theory, children process information according to a constantly evolving gender schema. Schemas are a network of cognitive connections that contain information about one's self and their gender, and they affect one's behavior, perception, attention, and way of thinking (Miller, 2016; Ruble et al., 2007 cited in Dönger, 2022). Children growing up in a society emphasizing the distinction between men and women learn to process information about themselves, others, events and objects according to these perceived gender associations (Yaşın Dökmen, 2015).

The concept that is accepted in the society but has nothing to do with gender can also be evaluated in these schemes. For example, while the concepts of "nightingale" and "gentle" resemble women, concepts such as "eagle" and "dashing" can be considered in the group of men. Gender schema is also a framework that forms the basis for perceiving male and female characteristics and processing information (Pehlivan, 2017). Bem (1981) proposed individual differences in the gender schemas that people hold. Genderschematic individuals see the world and themselves in terms of gender stereotypes; that is, males should be and act masculine, whereas females should be and act feminine (Cited in Galambos, 2004). The strong feature of the child is male; encoding the feature of being emotional for women is an example of a gender schema. (Değer, 2018).

According to the gender schema theory, children develop a gender schema through the learning process and these schemas describe gender-based characteristics. A schema is a cognitive construct; It is a network of associations that organizes and directs an individual's perceptions. A schema provides readiness to explore and absorb incoming information in terms associated with the schema. Individuals who are ready to process information through a certain schema can immediately encode information appropriate to the schema, organize it into categories related to the schema, and make differentiated judgments related to the schema. Processing information according to the gender schema leads to categorizing traits and behaviors into feminine and masculine categories. Even things that have nothing to do with gender are treated as feminine or masculine. For example; Traits such as “gentle” and “nightingale” can be placed in the feminine category, and traits such as “dashing” and “eagle” can be placed in the masculine category. Gender schema is also a framework that forms the basis for the perception of male and female characteristics and the processing of information (Franzoi, 1996, cited in Anar, 2011; Yasin Dökmen, 2015). Bem (1981) proposed individual differences in the gender schemas that people hold. Genderschematic individuals see the world and themselves in terms of gender stereotypes; that is, males should be and act masculine, whereas females should be and act feminine (Cited in Galambos, 2004). Gender schema theorists ask how and when children learn gender schemas, what kind of information they learn, and how their knowledge influences their behavior.

Conclusion

Gender is an important concept that shows how societies take a social and cultural form around gender-based and current gender perception. Gender shows the perception of gender formed in social life beyond the biological origins of being a woman and a man.

Traditional gender roles, stereotypes, and the belief that men and women are different have negative consequences for both men and women. These troubling results make people feel nervous.

In this study, one of the important points emphasized while discussing what is the issue of gender is or not is that the concept includes many social structures together.

In today's societies, the transformation of the traditional family structure into the nuclear family, the change in the roles and responsibilities of the individuals within the nuclear family structure, the increase in the education level of women and the fact that they are freed from being economically dependent on men have caused changes in the status of women in the society.

Although gender perceptions, perspectives on women and men, norms and roles have begun to change in the modern world, the secondary position of women still continues.

In many parts of the world, women are still unable to change their subordinate position and experience gender-based problems such as violence against women, lack of education and being left behind, deprivation of inheritance, inability to rise in business life and exposure to many discriminations. Gender-based discriminatory attitudes and it is very difficult to get rid of negative prejudices. Against the acquired rights of men, women have to struggle to obtain their rights.

While the structure of gender-based roles and responsibilities negatively affects women and puts them at a disadvantage, it can provide privileges to men in different areas of life. Gender stereotypes constantly reinforce the subordinate position of women. The sexist ideology produced by social institutions, which also determines gender; As we grow, it grows with us, multiplies and is passed on from generation to generation.

It is necessary to accept the existence of the gender phenomenon and to sensitize all parties, including the society, on this issue.

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