

GENDER THEORIES IN SOCIOLOGY

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Gender, in general sense, is understood as psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females, it is mostly about masculinity and femininity, it is not directly about biological sex (Giddens, 2009). Actually, sex mostly is understood as “sexual activity” today’s world, even though it means biological gender, so, having penis or having vagina. However, not only these characteristics define our gender, they only define our physical structure. For gender, it needs life style, social and cultural themes.

Functionalist Approach for Gender

As we know that functionalist approach holds society with the interdependent parts which constitute the whole. So, gender in this approach, gets place in very functional way which is formed in the beginning of history. Ancient times, there was very useful and efficient division of labor between men and women, in hunter and gatherer societies have men as hunter and outsider, women as mother, nurse and housekeeping (Lindsey, 2011). According to functionalists, this division of labor derives from biological differences between men and women, also Murdock held this issue as, sexual division of labor exists in every culture and it is not a result of biological “programming” but a logical basis for organizing in society (Giddens, 2009).

Parsons, one of the leaders of functionalist thinker, claims that acting according to proper roles for man and woman in the family also help for socialization of children. He mentioned from the roles as instrumental role -providing shelters, food etc- for father and expressive role –providing care and security for children, emotional support- for mother (Parsons & Bales, 1956).

I want to give a place for biological determinists’ ideas here also. Spencer, Comte and Durkheim have pointed some view for gender. According to Spencer, men and women should be equal, but, hence they have some biological differences, there is subordination of women by men. According to Comte, women has emotional and spiritual superiority, biological differences that women have, make her superior than men in emotionally. Lastly, according to Durkheim, women have some certain characteristics which make them more sensitive for mental disease, and so, women feel more secure in marriage, contrary to men.

Another functionalist view is that women have crucial important for socialization of children, and if children does not have mother or care of mother, they might have very serious social and psychological disorders, and John Bowlby calls this as “maternal deprivation” (Bowlby, 1953).

So sum up, according to functionalist theorists, in preindustrial societies, certain roles for men and women derive from their biological differences, on the other hand, in contemporary societies, those distinct roles are going to be less distinguished. Gender is something efficient, in order to move society in proper way, by giving male and female some distinct roles. Also, gender builds social unity thanks to men and women get together for forming a family (Macionis, 2010).

Conflict Theory in Gender

Conflict theory can be held as a struggle between dominant group which has the tool of production and worker class which is exploited by dominant one. Karl Marx is the father of conflict theory and his colleague Friederich Engel moved this idea and applied to the family structure, household. According to his view, relationship that between exploiter and exploited also exist in household in family. He differentiate modern and pre-modern societies in a way that men and women roles. In pre-modern societies, there was no big difference between these two gender and because there is no something for exploiting. Contrary, in modern societies, there is private property right and this right is transmitting by patriarchy. So, he says that there was no inequality in hunter and gatherer societies, inequality is a characteristic of capitalist system. In modern societies, because women are not paid for their house works, their works began to be seen as unnecessary, and men show themselves as bread winner (Lindsey, 2011).

According to Engel, capitalism makes male dominance more powerful, and he has explained this claim in three states. Firstly, capitalism provides power for men by giving them chance in order to have high income and private property. Secondly, women became the consumer part of society, because they do not produce,

but get money from their husband and spend for satisfy their need or enjoy. Thirdly, capitalism divides men and women in working way. It puts men to factory and women to house, however, it does not pay for women's workings in the house, but pays for men for his working in factory, so it puts importance to male's job by paying money (Macionis, 2010).

Even though we know Weber as a functionalist in sociology, in this issue, he has side of Engel, because, actually his mother and wife were activist feminists. So, he has not moved from Engel's point, he has agreed with him and he has explained it in his way, by saying, men have more prestige than women who have same job. Also Georg Simmel has pointed in same way and made some elaborations. He made some studying in order to see why women are considered inferior in society, how they handle their everyday life in capitalist society and in order to get how women handle with this inferiority, he worked with feminist groups.

To sum up, conflict theory claims that, gender is one of the dimensions of social inequality and conflict. Gender inequality provides a profit for men, but damage women. Engel sees marriage as a protection for both women and men. For women, it is a protection for their sexuality and for men; it is a protection for their private property. Lastly, capitalism exploits both men and women, by paying low for men and by keeping women at home (Macionis, 2010).

Symbolic Interaction Theory in Gender

Symbolic Interaction Theory is the fundamental approach in micro sociology, and it takes face to face interactions as the emergence point for social theory. This theory does not say anything about goodness or badness of gender. Instead, they see gender as a factor which provides us to form a relationship in daily life. On the other hand, gender put the men into the control center of society, and makes males people who shape the behaviors in society. Females behave more coherent behavior in typical way, other side males' behavior have tendency to make interaction start (Macionis, 2010).

Symbolic Interaction Theory claims that concepts such as – race, ethnicity or gender – are not naturally and objectively existed, but they occurred through society. Society named “females” or “males” are endowed with distinct character features defined as feminine or masculine. Gender does not exist by self, but with the interaction among people in society. So, they claim that, society is “doing” gender, and they show as an example Erving Goffman's “Dramaturgy” study (Lindsey, 2011).

According to Goffman's explanation, we have some roles inside of us and when their time comes, we use them in front of the stage. Thus, gender is one of our roles and we present them as male and female in society.

To sum up, symbolic interaction theory handles that individuals create their social reality via daily interactions, therefore, they see gender as a component of personal performance. Gender plays a role in order to shape all relationship of people in daily life (Macionis, 2010).

Feminist Theory in Gender

Feminist theory is most known and still alive theory in society about gender. Feminism is supporter for social equality of men and women and against to sexism and patriarchy. First feminism signs have been seen in 1840's America, for protesting of suffering of women and African -root- American people. At the end of these protests, they won voting right in 1920, but there is still defectiveness in gender equality in society (Macionis, 2010).

Feminists are against many issues in society; however, there are main five subjects that they generalize (Macionis, 2010).

Working for increasing equality in society.

Making large area for choices of people in society: They suggest reintegration of humanity.

Destroying the gender stratification.

Finishing the sexual violence.

Encourage the sexual freedom.

Feminism has three groups in theory, shortly:

Radical Feminism: They defend family system to end.

Liberal Feminism: They defend the equality of opportunity.

Marxist / Socialist Feminism: They defend gender roles and social classes to end.

I will point feminist theory by explaining Simon de Beauvoir. She explains her ideas in her book in four parts. In the first part, she is explaining biological approach. According to her, there are biological differences between two sexes and female is less powerful and short than male. She is talking about animals also for making certain the anatomical differences between two sexes. In biological approach, Freud also has made some points but he has not considered the social reasons in his explanation, and Beauvoir rejects his approach, because sees it as weak and loss of points, however, she also rejects Engel's approach.

In the second part, she emphasize that women were inferior also before capitalism and by saying this, she stays against Engel's point. She questioned the religion and claims that religion diminishes role of women in society. Even though Engel's says capitalism creates inequality between men and women, Beauvoir claims that industrial revolution gives women new roles which are close to men's role. These were that they were working together outside, they get place in unions; they became not equal but visible.

In the third part, she explains that women inferiority is produced not only in religion and family, but also science, science also legitimates inferiority of women. She describes how a girl learns to be subordinated. The woman has to be:

Youth => marriage => mothering => wider society

Women do not have right to lose control, they have to perform their role in society.

In the last part, she is talking about how women liberate herself, and she suggests that women have to handle with not only capitalism but also science, society and economy as well.

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