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**Question**

Is Gender relations changing in the 21st century ? What are the areas of change and the factors driving

**Answer**

A gender role, also known as a sex role, is a social role encompassing a range of behaviors and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their biological or perceived sex. .Gender roles are usually centered on conceptions of masculinity and femininity,although there are exceptions and variations. The specifics regarding these gendered expectations may vary substantially among cultures, while other characteristics may be common throughout a range of cultures. There is ongoing debate as to what extent gender roles and their variations are biologically determined, and to what extent they are socially constructed.

**Gender as a social construct**

Most children learn to categorize themselves by gender by the age of three. From birth, in the course of gender socialization, children learn gender stereotypes and roles from their parents and environment. In a traditional view, males learn to manipulate their physical and social environment through physical strength or dexterity, while girls learn to present themselves as objects to be viewed.

Social constructionists state, for example, that gender-segregated children's activities create the appearance that gender differences in behavior reflect an essential nature of male and female behavior.

As an aspect of role theory, gender role theory "treats these differing distributions of women and men into roles as the primary origin of sex-differentiated social behavior, their impact on behavior is mediated by psychological and social processes." According to Gilbert Herdt, gender roles arose from correspondent inference, meaning that general labour division was extended to gender roles.

Gender roles are considered by social constructionists to be hierarchical, and are characterized as a male-advantaged gender hierarchy.[28] The term patriarchy, according to researcher Andrew Cherlin, defines "a social order based on the domination of women by men, especially in agricultural societies".

**Gender Relations in the 21st century**

In the current generation of 21st Century, gender is often misunderstood as promotion of women who have taken more active role in different sectors and careers despite some traditions still hold women inferior in their society like numerous cases reported in Indian cultures women still come from traditional strict households, they have accepted their roles and feel comfortable in their decisions or lack thereof. Feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960’s and 70’s in the United States together with other Human Right groups that advocated for equal rights among all genders in recent centuries after observing women gender being domesticated by cultural norms, religious believes, traditional marginalisation yet for the few women who were out speaking role models showed great hope. Gender roles in communities changed lately whereby women now play equal role as men in owning lead large companies, very active in their families and communities, own personal businesses, manage big organisations, head political groups, earn higher academic degrees from all sectors equal to men, to mention but few as compared to early centuries. Both genders actively attend sporting events; go to bars and all other outdoor activities that were dominated by men alone. The 21st century demonstrates equal participation of both genders in different activities as compared to early centuries that kept women behind by being responsible for domestic chores. Gender being a central organising principle of society in social construction which governs the process of production, reproduction where consumption and distribution are elements in that setting, gender has remained a critical and major focus of society despite equal rights. Young genders both males and females are groomed up with knowledge of man being head of family. Religions across all denominations still hold believe of man being a superior being from woman gender. This naturally has left a gap between the two genders where by man still carries weight of being the head of the household though women headed families also perform equal roles but the family still remains incomplete without a man due to title, security, and other duties that women can’t perform.

**Areas of change in Gender relations in the 21st century**

1. **Marriage proposals**

Marriage proposal in early centuries, men typically propose to women which was traditionally their role but in the 21st Century, women are stepping up by proposing to men as they get down on their knees. They have boldly come out elaborating men initiative proposals that can’t wait any longer for men to propose. Sometimes cultures term them as taboo breakers who boldly ask their future husbands to be hand in marriage. Men traditionally take head the process of proposing for marriage but this has changed in the 21st century where women now take bold action in dating and propose for marriage. This has left some traditional cultures thinking of women proposing as prostitutes desperate for marriage for example in my Iteso Culture, men take lead in proposing for marriage but when woman proposes, man shys off in fear of mockery and insults from fellow men or woman might be having HIV/AIDS as to why she boldly took men role of proposing for marriage and men prefer traditional marriage proposals or weddings. This happens in rural villages. However, todays women can propose for marriage. According to Chicago Tribune Article on marriage, more women are proposing than ever before. Some are giving men engagement rings.

1. **Dress code**

Culturally dress code for men and women are defined by norms and expectations that relate to an understanding to tell difference between man and woman. The dress has the most direct contact with the human body and is therefore considered an integral part of the self. Garments influence and shape the appearance with significant impact on the construction of social identity (Tseelon 1989). Dress codes differ from culture to culture, religion to religion, tribe to tribe, some people use different dress code for different settings for different gender (marriage parties, church/mosque, offices, etc) for example the easiest identified dress code is men put on trousers and shirts while women put on skirts and blouses. However in the 21st century, the trousers are worn by both genders. Women dress on trousers, shirts and neck-ties like men while men as well take part in women dresses, skirts and blouse though not widely in public. This has been associated with gay proactive men. Meanwhile Brighton College in Britain is the first school to scrap uniform policy so all children can wear skirts or trousers (Mirror online by Steve Robson. January 20th 2016). In Islam women are required to wear modest forms of attire which covers from head to toe. Therefore all this depends on the traditional cultural environment either in rural or urban though in most urban settings adapt any kind of dress code. In other words the world of clothing is changing as new cultural influences meet technological innovations.

1. **Work**

Traditionally, both genders have different roles and responsibilities whereby men were considered responsible for taking care of the family financially; guiding the family while listening to their spouse though they make final decisions while women are to take care of children and household duties. During the 20th – 21st centuries, there strengthened Gender inequalities in all areas that are rooted in social structures but also in attitudes, said Professor Gillian Robinson, of the University of Ulster. Many arguments have shown imbalance at work. Others defend men to be more burdened while others argue that women are more burdened with daily chores such as laundry, cleaning, cooking food, shopping, looking after sick relatives and carrying our repairs while men only show significant contribution by other services of mending faulty items around the house. Both genders to some extent perform equal domestic duties though tradition still holds some societies.

**Factors**

1. **Gender Parity in Education**

There has been a steady progress over time in women’s and girls’ access to secondary education across all world regions, with the sharpest increase happening in countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Also, the gender gap has been reduced over time. However, there are still significant variations within the regions. In 2005, 82 out of 120 countries (i.e., 68 percent) with data available had achieved relative gender equality in secondary education, referred to in this article as “gender parity,” with a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 0.95 and above. Note that gender parity may occur even at low overall levels of education.) For developing countries, the corresponding rate was only 41 percent (25 out of 61 countries).

1. **Economic Development**

Historical data reveal a positive correlation between gender parity in education and economic development. The general conclusion that emerges from the literature is that economic development and gender equality are mutually reinforcing. While higher female education is generally acknowledged to raise national income, and higher income in turn leads to greater gender equality in education and in society at large (e.g) the relative education status of women in many developing countries is still low. Why should poor economic development halt the progression towards greater gender parity in education? In general, the level of economic development should affect both the education system (the supply of schooling) and the returns to education and the ability and willingness of parents to send their children, including their daughters, to school (the demand for schooling).

On the one hand, in poor countries where the number of children exceeds the capacity of schools, an increase of public education expenditures can expand the capacity of schools by providing more classrooms and teachers. With added capacity in schools, more children will be able to enroll in education. And if it is the case that majority of the boys in the population are already enrolled in schools, then it is likely that the majority of the new incoming students will be girls. This will in turn increase the female-male student ratio and hence increase gender parity. On the other hand, female schooling may be particularly sensitive to the costs associated with formal education. In other words, poverty can hinder girls’ education by affecting individual parents’ decisions as well as the government’s educational efforts. For example, the opportunity cost of education including income from child labor tend to be higher for girls since they are more often expected to do housework, take care of younger siblings, and/or work in agriculture. In a case-study from Kajiado in Kenya, Warrington and Kiragu found that, due to the tradition of early marriage, education of girls was often perceived as meaningless. Hence, when family income was short the already limited resources were rather spent on boys’ education.

In addition, underdevelopment, poor infrastructure, and low government spending on education typically correlate with poor quality education. In fact, various case studies (e.g., King and van der Walle on Laos and Lloyd et al.on Egypt) have shown that compared with boys, girls are less likely to enroll in and more likely to drop out of poor quality schools. Poor quality schools include buildings with leaking roofs, broken walls, and dysfunctional sanitary facilities and schools whose teachers are absent and where teaching materials and textbooks never arrive.